University of Alberta

# First Nation Family Culture:
# Implications for the Classroom

by

Pauline Giroux

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
in
First Nations' Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2000

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-59753-9

Canada

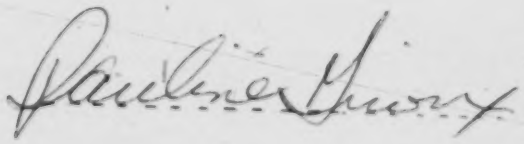
University of Alberta

Library Release Form

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Author: | Pauline Giroux |
| Title of Thesis: | **First Nation Family Culture: Implications for the Classroom** |
| Degree: | Master of Education |
| Year This Degree Granted: | 2000 |

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.



Box 136
Joussard, AB
T0G 1J0

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the importance of home and cultural background in First Nation students' academic achievement. This in-depth research took place within a First Nation community and involved four First Nation families with a single parent, two parents, a foster parent, and a grandmother acting as parent. My objective was to find common themes within a variety of family compositions.

The choice of methodology used to conduct this study was qualitative. Crowl (1996) stated that "qualitative research methods are used to examine questions that can best be answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment" (p. 10). Ethnography seemed to accommodate the study well, although some questions arose concerning protocol, possibly because the researcher is of First Nation ancestry.

The home and cultural backgrounds of the students were the main focus of this study, which relied on the perspectives of the parents and the children. These First Nation participants shared aspects of their lives from everyday living to their cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices.

Common themes emerged from the interviews and directed the study. These themes included (a) cultural aspects, (b) parenting, (c) types and uses of time, (d) the importance of friends, and (e) educational responsibilities. The children were academically higher than average students at the First Nation school in the community chosen for this study. The research findings revealed some misconceptions of culture.

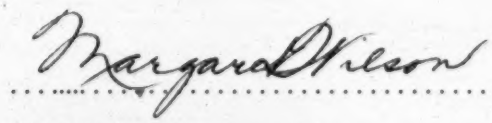
The educational experiences that children receive from their parents at a young age, the importance of use of time with children, and the importance of friends in a child's life seem to help them to achieve in school. The parents in this study expressed their desire to have their children successfully complete their schooling; as a result, they have chosen different parenting practices than their parents used. There are similarities in themes throughout these families even though they had different backgrounds. The

parents felt that there is too much trust in schools to provide a good education and that reinforcing good behavior at home through rewards improves academic achievement. The reflections of a First Nation researcher complete this study.

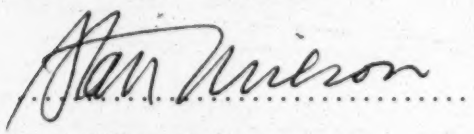
University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

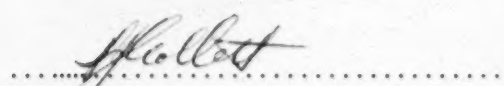
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **First Nation Family Culture: Implications for the Classroom** submitted by Pauline Giroux in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in First Nations' Education.



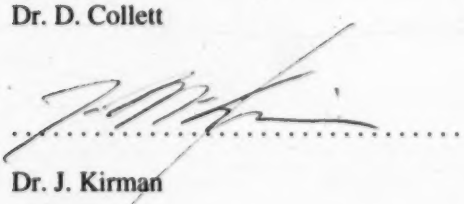
Dr. P. Wilson, Co-Supervisor



Dr. S. Wilson, Co-Supervisor



Dr. D. Collett



Dr. J. Kirman

This thesis is dedicated to all the people who have guided me from the spiritual world:

**My father Henry**

**My sister Rosemary**

**My uncle Eddy**

Without their influence in my home and cultural background, this thesis would have been very difficult to complete. I will continue to strive to fulfill their dreams for a positive tomorrow for all First Nation children.

**Acknowledgements**

First I would like to give thanks to the Creator for allowing me to have a tomorrow. I would also like to thank my mother, Maggie, who gave me precious life and nurturing. My greatest gratitude is to my spouse, John Henry. If not for his loving, understanding, and emotional and financial support, it would have been very difficult to complete my thesis. For my inspiration, I would like to thank my grandsons, Aaron and Dylan. They have brought into my life a new purpose, and I thank both of them for that. I would like to thank my daughters, Henri and Daisy, for giving me grandsons and for believing in me. They are the reasons that I strive to be a positive role model. I cannot forget Dan, a friend of the family, who helped me whenever I needed it.

I thank my professors, Dr. Peggy Wilson, Dr. Stan Wilson, and Dr. Dave Collett, for their intellectual support and guidance. I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Kirman, Dr. M. Haughey, Dr. M. Prokop and Joan White for their invaluable assistance.

I would like to thank all of my sisters, Marge, Lillian, Rose, Kathy, and my two brothers, William and Arthur, for being there and caring so much. Special thanks to Kathy for being there when I needed someone to listen to me, and to Rose for her moral support throughout our academic years. Special thanks to Marge for her shoulder and her kindness. The time spent on this thesis would have been meaningless without my family and my extended family circle. Thank you to my First Nation community for the financial support it has provided for me.

I would like to give special thanks to my editor, Linda Pasmore, whose patience and understanding have made preparing this document easier.

I would like to pass on my gratitude to all the people involved in the study; without them, this study would have been impossible. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your honesty, kindness, and sincerity. I would also like to say thanks to all the good people who have come into my life and helped me move one step closer to fulfilling my dream for a better tomorrow for First Nation children.

**Table of Contents**


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| I. | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | My Background Journey | 1 |
| | Statement of the Problem | 4 |
| | Rationale for the Research | 5 |
| | The Research Question | 6 |
| | Significance of the Study | 7 |
| II. | LITERATURE REVIEW: FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT | 9 |
| | Socioeconomic Factors | 9 |
| | Parental Child Rearing | 11 |
| | Culture and Language | 12 |
| | Socialization Factors | 15 |
| | Parental Influence | 17 |
| III. | METHODOLOGY | 19 |
| | Choosing the Site | 20 |
| | Choosing the Participants | 24 |
| | Gaining Consent and Establishing Rapport: Ethical/Cultural Protocol and Quandaries | 25 |
| | Data Collection | 26 |
| | The Interviews | 26 |
| IV. | PRESENTATION OF THE DATA | 29 |
| | The Family Vignettes | 29 |
| | Darla | 30 |
| | Carl | 30 |
| | Loretta | 31 |

Chapter Page


Clayton ..... 31
Elsie ..... 32
Eddy ..... 32
Bill ..... 33
Annie ..... 33
Clover ..... 34
Presenting the Themes ..... 34
Native Culture and Its Importance ..... 35
Native Culture at Home ..... 35
Native Culture in the Community ..... 37
Is Native Culture Acknowledged in School? ..... 38
Native Cultural Identity ..... 39
Native Cultural Perceptions ..... 39
Parenting ..... 40
Parenting Skills ..... 40
Who Is Responsible for What? ..... 42
Means of Gratification ..... 43
Educational Experiences ..... 45
Discipline ..... 46
Closeness as a Family Value ..... 46
Types of Meaningful Time ..... 47
Fun Meaningful Time ..... 48
Educational Meaningful Time ..... 49
Productive Meaningful Time ..... 50
The Importance of Friends ..... 50
Time Spent With Friends ..... 50

Chapter Page

Variation of Friends ..... 51

Peer Pressure ..... 52

Who Is Responsible for Education? ..... 53

Educational Concerns ..... 53

V. DATA ANALYSIS ..... 55

Cultural Paradigms ..... 55

Parenting Struggles ..... 62

Aspects of Meaningful Time ..... 66

Relating to Friendship ..... 67

Educational Responsibility and Concerns ..... 68

VI. CONCLUSION, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS ..... 70

Introduction ..... 70

Conclusion ..... 70

Summary of the Findings ..... 71

Recommendations: Future Studies ..... 76

Recommendations: Uses of the Study ..... 79

Reflections of a First Nation Researcher ..... 80

REFERENCES ..... 86

APPENDIX A: CONSENT LETTER ..... 91

APPENDIX B: CATEGORY GUIDE FOR CHILDREN ..... 93

CATEGORY GUIDE FOR ADULTS ..... 94

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

> Understanding where powerlessness came from in my childhood/adolescence and realizing the natural process of recovery I must take to change myself in a positive way enabled me to have a positive sense of self worth today. (Bellerose, 1997, workshop presentation)

The above quotation can be a guide for all First Nation people. It is important that the powerlessness we endure not manipulate or control our lives. Since attending the above workshop, I have slowly arrived at an understanding of my childhood and the essence that makes me an individual.

My childhood journey has been influenced by my home and cultural background, which are the foundations of my success in the academic world. Without proper guidance and support throughout my childhood, my path or my determination to succeed might have been altered. It is the manifested powerlessness of First Nation students within the academic world that produces the interest that gears this study. As a First Nation teacher I began noticing distinct displays of academic success within some students and not others. I questioned myself about what drives or guides this academic success in some of those students. For the answer, I kept returning to my background. This is where my interest in this subject was sparked, and it is with this interest that I have compiled the data for my study. This is why I will first share some of my own home and cultural background with the reader.

## My Background Journey

I was born in a First Nation community in northern Alberta. I was blessed with a loving mother and father (deceased) who cared about raising wholesome individuals. My father, bless his spirit, was the driving force and disciplinarian in our family. He had a way with teaching so that I enjoyed learning. He was a gentle man and would never have

done anything to bring harm to any of us. We all still miss him although he has been in the spirit world for more that 20 years. His teaching will never die, because as we have grown older, we have passed on the teachings that he gave us. These teachings include respect, politeness, understanding, caring, and giving. He has been our inspiration all these years.

I have two brothers and four sisters. I also had a niece that I called my sister; unfortunately, she was killed and now guides me from the spirit world. My sisters and brothers are very supportive of one another, and we are a very close family. I have numerous cousins and a number of uncles and aunties. They show all of us that they are proud of our successes through kind words and behavior toward us.

I am the middle child and did not mind my sisters' hand-me-downs. I was the youngest child for five years before my brother was born, and I had a great deal of time to be cared for by my brother and sisters. I remember Christmases when we would all get one gift each, and we would have a big dinner, bigger than usual, but not as big as today. I can still remember the joy of receiving gifts and the gratitude that we showed to our parents when we received something. We were not allowed to be ungrateful, because there were other things more disastrous that could happen than not getting what you wanted. At that time my father was teaching us Native culture, the way that it should be understood. To me, Native culture is a way of life; it is not just the dancing, the prayers, the ceremonies, the beading; it is a combination of all that and the way that one lives. This is the gift that my father gave me.

My mother was a product of a residential school, and her idea of Native culture was almost nonexistent; but with the help of my father's love and guidance, she was able to regain some of it. I remember that she would tell us that while she was at residential school she was not allowed to speak her language or have anything to do with Native culture. If she spoke her language, she would be hit and/or punished by not being allowed to have supper. She was told that Native culture was the work of the devil and that it

should not be followed. She is left-handed, but in the residential school she was punished when she used her left hand to write. They told her that only the devil's children were left-handed. To this day she writes with her right hand and still follows the Roman Catholic religion faithfully.

My father died when I was a teenager, but I did not yet appreciate all of the teachings that he had passed on to me. At that time I did not understand that the qualities that I possess now are a result of his teachings. My mother tried to become the driving force by the time I was a teenager, but she still had many problems with which to deal. However, she did her best to pass on what my dad had taught her.

In my high school years I had the opportunity to go to school outside my community. I was able to have friends other than my cousins or other relatives. It is not a bad thing, but having friends outside of the family allowed me to have a broader outlook on people. I was lucky and had the opportunity to live with one of my uncles in the city—lucky because this man (who has since passed on) grew to be a wise old Elder. But at the time that I was living with him, he was bitter about his life and society in general--and was very unhappy. In his later years he became my inspiration to strive for greater things in life while still behaving as a human being. I believe that he still guides me every day from the spirit world.

After I finished high school, I married and had two wonderful daughters, whom I love dearly. It is the teachings of my father, mother, and uncle that I have used to raise my children. After my second child was old enough to walk, I went to college as a mature student and worked very hard to obtain a diploma. I obtained employment in the educational field and began working with First Nation students. At first I was not very enthusiastic, but when I realized that they were alone in the big city, I began looking at their struggles from the point of view with which I was familiar. Their struggles were the same as those that I had had when I was in high school in the big city. Many of these children decided to return home because it was the easier thing for them. I was touched

by their struggle to cope in two worlds, and that was when I decided that I needed further education to help them.

After the summer of my graduating year, I went for an interview at my own First Nation community to obtain a teaching position in the school. There are only two qualified First Nation teachers from my community; unfortunately, the Chief and Council did not feel that they could just *offer* us teaching positions. This gesture would suggest to me that the Chief and Council were proud of our accomplishments. However, I had a successful interview, accepted a teaching position in an elementary grade, and remained in that position for four years. During that time many questions arose, and many remain unanswered. One of those questions sparked the focus of my study: If teachers understood more of a child's background, might they react or teach that child differently?

## Statement of the Problem

Having a First Nation background, I know what it is like to be misunderstood, neglected, and stereotyped by mainstream teachers in the educational system. Several teachers have told me that I would not amount to much in life, and I know that others have experienced this stereotyping. According to Brady (1996), "[Although] accurate figures are difficult to obtain, the rate at which Native youth prematurely exit the education system is substantially higher than that of the general population" (p. 10). In my opinion, too often First Nation students become failures in society because mainstream teachers misunderstand their background. Preconceived stereotyping seems to predetermine the outcome.

In the community where I conducted my study, the students have been dropping out of school at a much lower grade than was the case in prior years. Kieff (1994) stated that "teachers who explain a lack of diversity content in their curriculum by insisting that young children do not notice or care about differences among people seriously underestimate developmental realities" (p. 23). This could likewise be said about children

with a similar heritage but different home backgrounds. Many teachers do not work with the concepts of ethnic identity, bias, or even gender if they feel that the children are all from the same culture (Kieff, 1994).

To me, Native culture in the First Nation school is as important as Native culture in the home. Many researchers (Fierro, 1997; Huang, 1993; Lind, 1997; Wilson, 1989, 1994b), have indicated that there are cultural barriers in mainstream school systems. I have also found that culture can be a barrier in a First Nation school—not necessarily clashes within the same culture, but primarily the lack of understanding and awareness of how the home culture affects each family and individuals within the family.

According to Wilson (1994a), "Educators need to understand, to have the cultural knowledge and awareness to sensitize themselves into giving effective, caring instructions and to fit their knowledge into the value system of their students" (p. 314). Part of this knowledge might include the home and cultural background of each student. Acknowledging that each child brings with him or her a unique background can help to alleviate some of the problems that exist in First Nation schools. Baker and Sansone (1990) suggested that "there is reason to believe that some solutions to the current dropout problem may lie within the schools themselves" (p. 181). The solutions may lie in the acknowledgement of a child's home and cultural background. This is the focus of my study.

## Rationale for the Research

The time that I spent in the school system has led me to support what Hollins (1995) emphasized, that "an important part of understanding a different culture is learning how things are organized and how one goes about learning them in that culture" (p. 70). As I worked on my study, I too learned new concepts about my own Cree culture through spending quality time with people who have that cultural knowledge and have been willing to share it.

While I was teaching, I observed the students and acknowledged their need to share their experiences with someone who would listen. Each child had a unique story to tell or a unique memory to share, but no one was listening or paying attention. Every story told by children was part of their background, things that they did, how they did them, when they did them, and with whom. It is not enough to say that a student has a First Nation background. There are diversities of backgrounds within First Nation cultures themselves and within First Nation individuals. Hollins (1995) stated that

> culture is the medium for cognition and learning for all human beings, not just minority and low-economic children. It is not enough to add a course on multicultural education or attempt to integrate multicultural concepts across the curriculum in traditional pre-service teacher education programs. (p. 71)

Steinberg (1996) suggested that "the term *ethnicity* is a measure of individuals' cultural background rather than their biological ancestry" (p. 30).

## The Research Question

With all of this background in mind, my research question then became: According to the perception of selected First Nation families, how do cultural and home backgrounds influence the academic achievement of First Nation students?

What follows is a list of general areas that I considered in guiding my interviews:

- identifying how socioeconomic factors contribute to or hinder academic achievement,
- exploring how parental child-rearing practices contribute to academic achievement,
- summarizing how culture and language impede or influence academic achievement,
- analyzing how socialization impacts academic achievement, and
- exploring how parental background (such as level of education and discipline) influences academic achievement.

## Significance of the Study

It is my desire to illuminate the importance of home and cultural background to help the educational system to recognize these factors in First Nation students' academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the backgrounds of First Nation students through the voices of the parents and the children. I chose distinct characteristics for the parents in my study because I wanted a variety of home and cultural backgrounds. My concern as an educator is that not enough emphasis is placed on the background of First Nation children, and my hope is to spawn awareness, knowledge, and information in other educators who read my thesis. I have attempted to present the information in a way that the reader is able to understand more clearly that First Nation students have different home and cultural backgrounds even though they reside in the same community and belong to the same Native culture, and I have attempted to connect the concepts to academic achievements.

This study has been greatly influenced by the input of the parents and the children. These First Nation parents and children shared many aspects of their daily practices and traditional lives. I have tried to present the information in a way that manifests its value.

Chapter II of this thesis consists of the literature review with regard to other minorities and their backgrounds; however, there was little research available on First Nation home and cultural backgrounds and their influence on academic achievement. The chapter focuses on a variety of themes pertaining to my study. Chapter III deals with the methodology of the study. It describes the interview procedure I used to obtain the data from the parents and their children. Chapter IV includes excerpts from the taped interviews of the parents and children; their identities have been protected through the use of vignettes. Chapter V presents the analysis of the data and support from the research. Chapter VI is the conclusion or summary of the study and includes

recommendations for further studies. *Reflections of a First Nation Researcher* are found at the end of the chapter.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW: FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A review of the literature pertaining to the influence of culture and home background on First Nation academic achievement in school revealed a lack of research in this area.

Numerous studies available on various other ethnic backgrounds assisted in the conceptual framework of my research. In the following chapter I will describe some of these studies to enhance my own understanding. I will include such topics as socioeconomic factors and their influence on school achievement, parental child rearing, Native culture and language, socialization, and parental influence.

## Socioeconomic Factors

Many researchers have noted that socioeconomic background influences the achievement of high academic standards. Slavin (1998) stated that public school, once thought the most equalizing institution in our society, plays as much of a role in magnifying the differences between children from wealthy, impoverished, and different ethnic backgrounds as it does in overcoming these differences. Many children are not given the chance to exhibit their potential. They are perceived to have no opportunity for advancement. Slavin believed that children from lower-class homes start off at a disadvantage, with less access to prenatal and early health care or to quality day care, the very things that children from middle-class homes take for granted. De Lone (1979) contended that unequal distribution of wealth ensures inequality of children's opportunities, despite efforts of social reform. Slavin noted that schools have no power over the economic background of students, but have a powerful impact on the educational success of all children and can greatly increase the achievement of disadvantaged and minority children.

Lind (1997) and Hadaway, Florez, and Wisemen (1988) indicated that students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, coupled with low-economic status, tend to be less motivated and are perceived by educators to struggle academically. This perception constrains disadvantaged and minority students from attempting to master certain subjects in school.

Students asserted that teachers who are sensitive and empathetic to problems that the students encounter in mastering subject-matter knowledge influence their feelings about school and their ability to achieve academically. Phelan, Cao, and Davidson (1992) and Brady (1996) stated that investigators have also identified factors that are specific to the educational system, including evidence that these students are not intrinsically motivated and often feel alienated from the school culture. Wilson (1994a) argued that teachers being available for students was not, in and of itself, enough without being accompanied with genuineness and caring.

Often students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are treated poorly by their peers and their teachers. Brady (1996) claimed that they are excluded from the institutional culture of the school. He further noted that there is a strong correlation between the economic position of individual Native students and their inclination to drop out of school. There seems also to be a relation between low self-esteem and low socioeconomic status. Students need to feel good about themselves and who they are. Westfall and Pisapia (1994) suggested that providing a system of recognition for valued behavior, even if the definitions of valued behavior must be expanded, is helpful to the at-risk student who is seldom the high achiever in academics or athletics. Furthermore, Westfall and Pisapia contended that receiving recognition may be the first step toward developing self-esteem and beginning an upward spiral of further success. It is important, if not imperative, that teachers recognize the stigma that follows a student from a low socioeconomic background. It is entirely plausible to suggest that, although being a member of a visible minority does play a significant role in the decision

to drop out, being part of a larger cultural minority (the socioeconomically-economically disadvantaged) plays an equal, if not greater, role in this phenomenon (Brady, 1996). Along with low socioeconomic factors, educators perceive that different modes of child rearing can be a contributing factor to academic achievement.

## Parental Child Rearing

There are many concepts of child rearing. The way children are treated or acknowledged by their parents creates a world of difference between achieving and underachieving in school. Robertson (1997) noted that it may be enough for parents to be available simply to listen and suggest coping strategies, provide a supportive home environment, and encourage the child's participation in school activities. Children need to feel safe and have a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to provide a healthy, clean, and loving environment for children to grow and achieve to their maximum potential. Parents need to establish a variety of substantial rules and responsibilities for children. Unfortunately, according to Roddy (1984), there is some evidence that the social and emotional adjustment of urban Black children—from both single-parent and two-parent families—may be hindered by the *latchkey phenomenon*, a term used to describe the increasing number of children who, for a certain number of hours each day before their parents come home from work, are expected to care for themselves without supervision of an adult. Long and Long (as cited in Roddy, 1984) and Wilson (1994b) found that such children often suffer increasing fear and insecurity.

Children build their foundations from specific parenting styles and parental practices. Chao (1995) stated that parenting styles represent the emotional tone or equality of the parent-child relationship. Examples of these emotional qualities apparent in parent-child interaction involve "tone of voice, body language, inattention, burst of temper, and so on" (p. 3). According to this concept, there is a relationship between parental practices and specific development outcomes. Parents who instill values and

respect in their offspring produce a more holistic child. Ing (1991) expressed concern that too many Native children are in the Ministry's care and that it is incumbent upon us to help each other to prevent this in the future through relearning lost child-rearing patterns.

Child rearing in a Native family not only includes parents and siblings, but it is also the responsibility of the extended family. In today's society, the above concept is problematic. It is, in my opinion, not practiced as much as it should be. I am not convinced that it is completely lost, but the diminishing practice of extended-family child rearing can be attributed to the loss of the culture and language of Native people through the residential school experience (Ing, 1991). Ing contended that "the removal of Native children from parents to be raised in residential schools deprived those children of a cultural legacy" (p. 82).

## Culture and Language

The diversity in cultural and linguistic backgrounds plays a major role in academic achievement. Spindler (1984) and Hollins (1995) noted that each culture is not only an integrated whole, but also has its own rules for learning, which are reinforced by different patterns of overall recognition. Hollins maintained that culture is the medium for cognition and learning for all human beings, not just for ethnic-minority and low-income children. It is not enough to add a course on multicultural education or attempt to integrate multicultural concepts across the curriculum in traditional preservice teacher-education programs.

Students from different cultural backgrounds may encounter problems adjusting to their immediate surroundings, such as their peers, school activities, socialization, and so on. Steinberg (1996) noted that youngsters' patterns of activity, interest, and friendship were all influenced by their ethnic backgrounds. According to Steinberg, one of the most consistent observations reported by social scientists who study school achievement in this

country is that Asian-American students perform, on average, substantially better than their White peers, who in turn outperform their Black and Latino counterparts.

Teachers encounter a world of diverse cultures in most classrooms. It is their duty to prepare all the students as much as possible to achieve academically and to understand each other's needs. Spindler (1987) wisely stated that the teacher who intends to become effective as a cultural transmitter and an agent of socialization, as all teachers should be, must learn something of the neighborhood and of the homes from which their children come. However, this step is rarely taken. In some home environments, children determine their own schedules for eating, sleeping, and playing (Spindler, 1987), which is often unsupervised. In contrast, the school environment differs extremely in that, according to Spindler, all school play is supervised, scheduled, and centered around objects deemed suitable for young minds. In the home environment, students use verbal communication, are not compelled to use written communication, and tend to use their first language in the home. This immersion becomes a hindrance in mainstream schools and creates misunderstanding among teachers and students. McCobb (1994) recognized that teachers receive training which includes an emphasis on the learning process, child development, and literacy development, but very little in teaching content material for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Students demonstrate their culture in a variety of circumstances. Lind (1997) claimed that some students represent cultures that place greater value on the spoken word than others do. Some cultures value the authority of teachers, whereas others place less value on their contributions. Culture and language influence academic achievement in a variety of ways. In the classroom, communication can become a problem, according to Lind, depending on the degree to which cultural differences affect the meanings of words. These differences may be extensive and often hard to identify in daily communication. Nonverbal communication can include the use of time, voice, feet,

hands, body, eyes, and space, which are all potential areas of misunderstanding (Hall, 1966).

A long-standing and still-held, to some extent, cultural belief is that Natives should not maintain eye contact to prevent their spirits from being stolen by another person. Still some Natives believe that avoiding eye contact is a gesture of politeness or not being rude. However, authoritative figures, such as teachers, may demand eye contact, which, as Lind (1997) suggested, can lead to misunderstandings between culturally different communicators. For example, Lind provided an example in which an Arab's eye contact with an American was misinterpreted by the American to be a sign of aggression. Lind went on to explain that Blacks' use of eye contact can lead to miscuing and awkwardness of conversational flow.

My experience as a teacher in a cultural setting has given me a chance to acknowledge and gain insight into the vast cultural and language diversities that permeate the classroom. This understanding comes from within my own cultural background. Should First Nation culture be eminent in a First Nation community? This is a debatable question because the meaning of culture can be identified in various ways. Huang (1993) described culture as "values and norms embedded in language, religion, philosophy, custom and social organization forms such as family" (p. 3); Hollins (1995) contended that "each culture is not only an integrated whole but has its own rules for learning" (p. 70). Culture is part of the individual, so if that part is neglected in the education system, then, automatically, some part of the individual is ignored. Lind (1997) stated that "students in the classroom each represent an unique individual who is influenced by many lived experiences, including those influenced by culture" (p. 2). Culture should be an integral entity within the educational system. It should not be placed on a shelf to collect dust, because it is part of a human being. Lind emphasized:

> Research on learning differences informs us of many different ways in which students from differing cultures function in the classroom. Culture differences can provide rich opportunity for new experiences and to learn of differing perspectives: cultural differences can also be the cause for great misunderstanding. (p. 2)

Hadaway et al. (1988) stated that teachers/administrators are unprepared to understand the cultural differences and educational inequalities within schools. Although minority students have the potential to be successful, they are often not given the opportunity to develop their social and academic skills.

Students with cultural and linguistic differences may have differing learning styles, according to the research. Fierro (1997) claimed that African-American students are often described as being physically active, valuing verbal experiences, and placing importance on personal relationship; Hispanic students as being comfortable with cognitive relationships and placing importance on the group above that of the individual; Asian-American students as being serious and valuing accuracy and objective content; and Native-American students as having acute visual discrimination and skills in the use of imagery. However, this stereotyping does not consider each individual within the group. All members possess these traits. Culture and language become integrated within the socialization realm of the student.

## Socialization Factors

Socialization is probably one of the most important activities for human beings. Interaction with others becomes a stepping stone to individuality and self-identity. Kieff (1994) noted that some teachers do not understand how crucial it is for young children to have diverse, positive experiences at the time that they are forming their own identities. It is imperative that teachers not transmit their own stereotyping and bias, which could influence the way students feel about themselves. The research has revealed that

> (1) children begin to notice differences and construct classificatory and evaluative categories very early,
> (2) there are overlapping but distinguishable developmental tasks and steps in the construction of identity and attitudes, and
> (3) societal stereotyping and bias influence children's self-concept and attitudes toward others (pp. 22-23).

In today's society, students demonstrate an extreme need to belong to a particular group. Many students are consciously or unconsciously manipulated into belonging to a group that is not accepted by the majority of our society. Phelan et al. (1992) stated that peer groups are instrumental in the lives of adolescents and can pull young people towards behavior destructive to themselves and others. They continued that involvement in gang activity, although providing emotional support and a sense of belonging, can also involve youth in violent and dangerous confrontations.

Many minority students exhibit an extreme desire to maintain some type of relationship with other individuals within the educational system. Wilson (1994a) noted that many minority students rely heavily on the personal relationship that exists between themselves and the cultural agent who transmits the material. Wilson observed in her research that there was a more desperate need for fellowship and affiliation than for course remediation. This formal agenda is, in fact, a means of enhancing academic performance.

Students who are retained in a grade may feel some loss of self-concept and begin to display undesirable behavior. It is then questionable whether retaining the students is actually advantageous for the student or the teacher. George (1993) emphasized in his study that students who repeated a grade performed less well than did matched groups of promoted students in academic achievement, personal adjustment, self-concept, and attitude toward school. In addition, retained students are up to 30% more likely than promoted students to drop out of school by Grade 9, even after the effects of background, gender, and achievement are taken into consideration (George, 1993). As well as these

diverse factors influencing academic achievement, parental influence cannot be disregarded.

## Parental Influence

Parental aspirations and attributes encourage a child to strive for and gain recognition within his or her surrounding world. Parents can instill high expectations and goals in their children. Gordon (1987) stated that in Asia most child-care responsibilities rest with the mother. Often mothers, particularly the Japanese, identify their personal success with the educational success of their children. Some are quite devoted to, even obsessed with, helping their offspring achieve.

Cultural background as perceived by parents can also influence academic achievement. If the parents have a good understanding of their cultural background, they will transmit this understanding to their children. Soldier (1992) observed that cultures change through the years, so that the degree of cultural orientation that children bring with them into the classroom will vary depending on the strength of their ethnic identification and how acculturated their parents are. Parents who have a high level of education and social status—well-paying positions on or off the reservation—are more likely to have accepted the non-Native American value system and behaviors and feel comfortable in a variety of social settings (Soldier, 1992).

Students who do not have a good concept of their culture or have experienced alienation from their culture may demonstrate negative adjustments within the mainstream society. Soldier (1992) commented that if children from traditionally oriented homes are pressured to conform to an unfamiliar value system in school, frustration and identity problems may result from the conflicts they experience. A good example of this negative force of cultural alienation is the residential school, a parental influence that many Native people remember and continue to live with the negative effects. Ing (1991) shared her views that, like most of the pupils who left a residential school,

> I have low self-esteem, I did not value education, I did not respect my heritage or my family and I suffered from inferiority complex. . . . I never made a decision for myself, I was highly dependent on authority figures. I was distant, pathetically shy and silent. I grew up in a parentless world. (preface)

Early research according to Roddy indicated that children from single-parent families scored significantly lower on achievement tests, had more behavioral problems in school, and received lower teacher-assigned grades than did children in two-parent families. However, recent work has reexamined the findings and found that single-parent children are at less academic risk than previously thought (Roddy, 1984).

Parents need to become involved in their child's education to become familiar with the curriculum and the teaching methods used in the classroom. Coleman (1991) stated that today the link between these institutions is taking on added significance as concern mounts over the challenges that preschools face in building or maintaining strong parent participation. He cautioned that, in order to meet the needs of all families effectively, parent participation programs must give equal consideration to the needs of all families represented in the class. Parents play a vital role in their children's behavior, education, health, and attitudes. It is important, as parents, that we create a bond between the school and the child on issues concerning education to allow parents to foster academic achievement in their child.

## CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

Armed with what I thought would be appropriate research tools (both academically and culturally), I set out to find a community and participants who would help me to answer my research question: "How do culture and/or home background affect the academic achievement of First Nation students?" I had taken a general research methods course which looked at various qualitative and quantitative methodologies. I felt that a qualitative approach would work best for my study, and I took a graduate course in ethnography and another in indigenous research methods. I studied carefully the works of Spradley (1979, 1980), Spindler and Spindler (1982), Fetterman (1989), Wilcox (1988), and Wolcott (1987).

Crowl (1996) stated that "qualitative research methods are used to examine questions that can best be answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment" (p. 10). I learned that ethnography was originally "the key tool of the anthropologist studying a non-western society" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 53). Although I am not an anthropologist, I could see the value in using this approach to study my own ethnically diverse and complex society. I was motivated by Wood's (1986) description of ethnography, which, he emphasized,

> is concerned with what people are, how they behave, how they interact together. It aims to uncover their beliefs, values, perceptions, motivation and how all these things develop or change over time or from situation to situation. It tries to do all this from within the group and from the perspectives of the group's members. (p. 4)

According to Park (1997), "What constitutes an ethnography, what defines a good ethnography and how to do an ethnography are highly debated questions" (p. 41). These debates are carried on at length in works by Clifford (1988), Geertz (1988), Spradley

(1979), and Hammersley (1992). I did not want my study to have to answer to the criteria set necessarily for an ethnography, but I certainly wanted to use the tools and guidelines outlined by Spradley (1979) in *The Ethnographic Interview*. Agar (1980; pp. 69-77) listed the differences between ethnography and other social science methods. Basically, it could be said that my study is qualitative and uses ethnographic tools to collect the data. Those ethnographic tools allowed for the expression of the participants' cultural perspectives. They allowed individuals to give information at a grass root level. Crowl (1996) indicated that "the purpose of ethnographic research is to provide a rich, detailed verbal description of how members of a culture perceive the culture"(p. 11).

Coming from within the Native culture that I would be studying, I used an emic perspective. The emic perspective denotes the researcher as an insider looking in or "working within the conceptual framework or view of those studied" (Silverman, 1993, p. 24). This perspective is quite different from the etic one which is used by most anthropologists as they look at a culture outside of their own world view. I realized, however, that, in order to see and hear what was going on, I would often have to "make the familiar become strange" (Spindler & Spindler, 1982, p. 20). Living and having been raised in a First Nation community, I often took for granted the actions, values, behaviors, and norms that occurred around me on a minute-by-minute and day-by-day basis.

## Choosing the Site

I wanted the site of my study to meet a number of important criteria, predominantly a First Nation population:

- a band[1]-operated school
- a mix of Native and non-Native teachers

---

[1] *Band* is a term used to identify a particular aboriginal community as stated in the Indian Act of Canada.

- parents who were willing to talk about their children's school experiences
- students who were willing to talk about their school experiences
- a northern setting
- a rural setting

I found a reserve in northern Alberta that met all the criteria that I had set out. *The Oota First Nation*[2] is located approximately 800 kilometers northeast of Edmonton, Alberta, in a wooded area. Most of the time the wooded environment creates tranquillity, but at other times there is a sense of isolation from the rest of the world. It seems far away from outside influences. The land is not good for growing of crops; even growing hay is a challenge. In that sense the land is good only for building houses and raising horses or cattle. *Oota* is divided by paved highway that is frequented by many travelers.

*Oota* is located beside a lake, and a river flows through the middle of the community. The lake has always been the focal point of *Oota* because of the fishing that takes place there, which is more a way of life than a source of economic sustenance. For many people the fishing helps to maintain the connection to Mother Earth. Fishing is a year-round pastime for many of the people.

Approximately 1,000 people reside in this community. Most of the adults between the ages of 35 and 40 years old are Cree speakers; they do not speak it fluently, but they understand the language very well. Most children of this community do not speak the Cree language, but a few of them understand enough to carry on a conversation with the Cree speakers. Most of the people between the ages of 18 and 34 do not speak or understand Cree at all. Their predominant language is English, which is more widely spoken in public than Cree.

Three major non-Native towns surround this community which offer employment to some of the residents in the sawmills and other establishments. There are grocery

---

[2] Pseudonyms are used throughout this study to identify persons and places.

stores, clothing stores, and other facilities for shopping or entertainment in the towns. These three towns have bingo halls, restaurants, and taverns that attract the First Nation people seeking entertainment. The driving time to these towns ranges from half an hour to one hour. They are frequently visited on payday weekends, on allowance days, or at the end of the month by most of the First Nation people. Some people from *Oota* actually travel as far as Edmonton on paydays for shopping and entertainment.

Numerous job opportunities are available to the residents of *Oota* because of the various programs and facilities administered by First Nation people, including a health program, a band-operated school, an adult school, band office programs, education, youth programs, band police, a gym, and social/child care services. I would estimate that at least 80% of the working residents that live on the reserve work there. The remaining 20% work out of the community, receive assistance through government programs, own a business, or are elected Band Council members who earn money from attending various meetings.

The average education varies among the different age groups in the community. The young children are still in school, although some of them prefer to be out of school and try very hard to get out. The teenager's average education is Grade 8, although a few are pursuing college degrees. Some people between the ages of 18 and 45 have challenged college or university as mature students. Many over 50 years have gone to residential school and completed, on average, Grade 5. One or two people from the community have pursued higher education, even to the graduate level.

Daily activities for young children consist of going to the restaurant to meet their friends, riding their bicycles or all-terrain vehicles (quads and trikes), visiting friends, or participating in the occasional sports activity organized by the youth worker. Some teenagers and young adults go to the gym to work out. It is also a place to meet their friends. Some enjoy the occasional golf game or movie at one of the surrounding towns.

The community has traditional activities annually, such as the powwow, round dances, treaty days, feasts, and various walks for charities. Most of the people become involved in these activities, which bring the community together as a unit. Many of the activities also include surrounding communities.

*Oota* First Nation administers its own health facilities, with a resident nurse on call at all times. Once a week the doctor comes to the health unit to see his patients, although the option to see another physician outside the community is available at the cost of the transportation unit. The health unit includes a registered health nurse, an alcohol addiction counselor, a transportation unit, and diabetic care administered by the CHR (community health representative). Like many First Nations, *Oota* has a high rate of diabetes. Care, knowledge, and awareness need to be fostered in order to get the people to become healthy individuals. There seems to be a genuine concern for diabetics among the people from the health unit.

Most of the people do their shopping out of the community, although the community has several convenience stores/gas stations. Residents buy their gas in the community. Some people utilize the tire shop; the used-car, heavy-equipment, and plumbing businesses; and the taxi service right in the community; these business are owned and operated by First Nation individuals. Still others use the services in nearby towns.

Many of the residents of *Oota* were baptized Roman Catholic but have chosen to follow their traditional spirituality. As in many First Nation communities, many practice spirituality through various types of ceremonies which are respected by all the participants and assist them in creating a special bond with one another. The people of *Oota* seem to obtain strength through these special ceremonies—the strength to continue the struggle to become a prosperous community.

## Choosing the Participants

Spradley (1979, pp. 45-53), in *The Ethnographic Interview* cited a number of criteria for choosing effective informants for any ethnographic study. These include the following:

1. A good informant is thoroughly enculturated; that is, they know their culture well and are able in some way to articulate the customs of that culture.
2. They are currently involved; that is, they use their knowledge to guide their actions.
3. They have adequate time to be interviewed appropriately.
4. They are nonanalytic (because it is the researcher who wants and needs to discover patterns of meaning in what the informants say).

I wanted to consider Spradley's recommendations and add them to my own criteria for this study. For instance, I wanted to hear from (a) a single-parent family, (b) a grandmother who was the guardian of a family, (c) a two-parent family, and (d) a foster-parent family. I also wanted to interview a child from each of the above categories.

Selecting the families from this community was not an easy task. Many families in the community fit the prescribed criteria equally well. The major determinant in choosing the participants then became the children who would be involved; specifically, those who were successful academically. As a teacher, I relied on the school records to ascertain academic success. The records showed that the students in this study were above average achievers in most of their classes, and I selected them for that reason. Their attendance in the first five years of school was better than average, although the records showed that as they went into higher grades, they tended to miss more school than they had in previous years. Many of their kindergarten test scores indicated that they had achieved significantly better than the average student and that they had been prepared at home before they entered kindergarten. The records also revealed positive comments

by previous teachers, many of which showed that none of these students had had behavior problems. They came to school willing to work hard and to be good listeners, and they were enthusiastic, got along well with others, and worked quietly.

In order to assist the reader in understanding more clearly the family units involved in this study and to protect the identities of the families involved, I have elected to use composite vignettes to describe each. (Please see Chapter 4: Presentation of the Data.)

## Gaining Consent and Establishing Rapport: Ethical/Cultural Protocol and Quandaries

Before I left the university to set out on my research journey, I completed a University Ethics Review. I passed the review, the purpose of which was to protect the university from any harm done by my mistakes I might make. My concern, however, was more for the community and my own credibility as a student researcher virtually inexperienced in this kind of work. I knew that if I wanted to work and/or live in a First Nation community again, there was no room for mistakes.

Many researchers had gone before me (non-Native researchers primarily) who had not respected the cultural protocol and norms of First Nation peoples (Smith, 1999). I knew I had a fine line to walk. A certain protocol had to be followed, yet this protocol was in some instances contrary to commitments that I had had to make to the university in order to pass my ethics review. For instance, I knew that correct and appropriate cultural protocol in most traditional First Nation communities called for the offering of tobacco when asking for participation before ever beginning the process of research. However, once the tobacco is accepted, this binds the participant to continue through to the conclusion of the study. The university, on the other hand, expected me to ask the participants to sign consent letters (see Appendix A) that allowed them the right to opt out of the study at any time before its completion without repercussion. I knew that the

only thing that I could do was to break protocol and in some sense adapt tradition to meet the needs of both of my masters. I chose therefore to offer tobacco as a thank you after the participants had taken part in the study. This remains to me a questionable aspect of my study and one that needs future investigation by indigenous researchers.

## Data Collection

Ethnographic methods and techniques complement each other in the discovery and description process (Fetterman, 1989, p. 72). The tools that I used in this study included informal ethnographic interviews rather than structured or semistructured interviews, more in line with the suggestions of Kvale (1996) in his book *InterViews* when he described conversational interviews. In other words, they were directed conversations during which I kept in mind the research question at all times. I also used audiotape recordings, as well as observations as described by Spradley (1980) in *Participant Observation*. I was a nonparticipant observer.

Rather than having prewritten questions, I had categories which I wished to address (see Appendix B). Some of the categories included perceptions on education, cultural inclusion, parenting skills and education, and socialization and the influence of friends. My first visit was a familiarizing experience for both parties. I gave participants about a week to think about becoming involved in the study. After a week, or whenever convenient, I explained the consent letter and forms (see Appendix A) to the participants. This included translating the consent letter into Cree for those who did not understand English well. Once the consent letter was signed, I set up appointments for interviews at a later date. Each person involved shared his or her enthusiasm with me.

## The Interviews

The interviews began with small talk that included the weather and events happening in the community. I turned on the tape recorder, and it seemed to be the focus of the interview. I later learned that the tape recorder inhibited many of the participants

from answering the questions. Therefore, whatever was said before the tape recorder was turned on or after it was turned off was considered as informal interview data and was used in the study with the verbal consent of the participants.

Most interviews were done at the participants' homes. For one parent, I did my interviewing at a place of my choosing because the participant felt that the children in her house might be a distraction. She informed me that she really enjoyed getting out and visiting another home. I made tea for her where I was staying, and we had small talk; she looked at some of my photos, and then we proceeded to begin our interviews. My main objective was to make her as comfortable as I could in a strange environment.

For the children, the interviews were done mainly in my car, and the parents agreed with this procedure. They wanted us to have privacy in the interview without any distractions from other people in the house.

When interviewing in parental homes, I tried not to disrupt the family's daily way of life. I took into consideration unforeseen cancellations of interviews, and I made the families feel that it was their prerogative to stay on schedule or not. I did not want to make them feel that I was in charge of this study. Instead, I wanted them to feel that they were the First Nation cultural experts and keepers of the knowledge for this study.

Eisner (1998) noted that "the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work" (pp. 81-82) or live. I soon sensed the power of the interview process, but I learned also that I had to hone my listening skills to include tone of voice, mannerisms, body language, and expressions, because they all added to the depth of the data that were being presented.

To further verify information that I had gained from the interviews, I used what Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 180) referred to as *triangulation*. Goetz and Lecompte (1984) explained that "triangulation prevents the investigator from accepting too readily the validity of initial impressions; it enhances the scope, density and clarity of constructs of the investigation" (p. 11). This triangulation came in the form of observations and

school records, to which I was allowed access. The records provided information and gave me an opportunity to spend more time in school. They verified the differing academic statuses of the children whom I interviewed and gave me a more in-depth look into their academic achievements.

Observation was primarily done at an informal level. I observed the children during the time that the interviews took place, looking for interaction and behavioral aspects or traits of the child. I noted family interaction. I also made observations during school and community activities. Whatever method of obtaining the information was employed, it soon became a learning experience for me. I have written about this in the segment called *Reflection of a First Nation Researcher* at the conclusion of this study.

# CHAPTER IV

# PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Within any First Nation community there is as much diversity within family groups as there would be in a community that had varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I wanted to know whether or not common themes would arise if I interviewed within a variety of family compositions. For this reason I chose to collect my data from a single-parent family, from a family whose guardian was the grandmother, from a two-parent family, and from a foster-parent family. Although there were other family compositions, such as single-father families, and blended families, I chose to include the four previously mentioned family types because of the anticipated amount of data the might be involved. In the First Nation community I studied, there were a number of single-parent and two-parent families, but there was a limited number of foster-parent and grandmother-parented families.

## The Family Vignettes

In order to better understand the complexity of the families I interviewed, I have chosen to conceal their individual identities by describing each in an individual vignette. The relationships in the families included a parent/parents and a child. I have arranged the names in the vignettes to begin with the parent/parents, followed by the child's name. For example Darla is the mother of her son, Carl; Loretta is the foster mother of Clayton; Elsie is the grandmother of her grandson, Eddy; and Bill and Annie are the parents of daughter, Clover. Pseudonyms are used to identify individuals.

**Darla**

The single parent of this family unit was approximately 40 years old and had never been married. By mutual agreement, her child's father decided to return to school, leaving her to raise their son. Darla was a good provider and kept the house in very appealing order.

Darla had a very special bond with her son, demonstrating her affection for him in a very positive way; he showed reciprocal affection. Her attitudes towards being a single parent seemed to be very positive, and she was pleased with the results of her parenting. Her activities, whether indoors or out, always seemed to include her son, who was a big part of her life. She liked to travel so that she could share with her child what the outside of the community had to offer.

Often wearing her hair in braids, Darla was very proud of her Native heritage. She had a reputation for speaking with honesty and caring about human beings with sincere compassion. Darla was very much in tune with her natural surroundings and loved nature in general; her favorite activities involved the outdoors. I found her very easy to talk to, and she had a good sense of humor.

**Carl**

Carl was 16 years old. He respected his mother and accepted the teachings that she offered. He seemed to demonstrate his willingness to explore new experiences and was very curious about what was happening around him. Being very athletic, Carl also liked the outdoors. He had a good perception of how to acquire the best of both worlds (non-Native and Native) and tried to become involved in activities in both worlds; for example, riding in the rodeo, playing hockey and baseball, and participating in powwows.

Carl seemed very respectful of and honest with people and had no problem getting along with everybody; he had many friends. In his elementary school years, discipline was apparently not a major problem. He seemed to enjoy his childhood years

and did very well in school. Carl grew up in this community but now desired to move on and explore what the outside world had to offer.

**Loretta**

Loretta as a foster mother was a warm and caring person. Having been a foster mom for many years, she had had many children under her care. Three of her own four children were no longer living at home.

Loretta was very close to her children as well as to the children placed in her home and tried to provide the most comfortable home that she possibly could. She understood and was very compassionate with children. Constantly involved in the foster children's school activities or visitations and in community activities, she was well respected in the community. Loretta made me feel comfortable, and I found her very easy to talk to.

Loretta had the qualities of what I would consider a pure Native women. She wanted her foster children and her own children to learn their culture as they continued their journey in life.

**Clayton**

Clayton was 14 years old. He seemed very pleased with where he was living. He showed a great deal of respect for his foster mom and never created major problems for her. He was a very outgoing young man, respectful, and liked to be involved in community and school activities. Clayton was well liked by his peers, and he got along well with his teachers. His being a foster child does not seem to be a problem for the other children in his life.

Clayton enjoyed visiting his real mother whenever he had the chance, but he expressed his gratitude to his foster mom by doing chores and other things. He liked to play outdoors, read, and do his school work. He strove to please in school and at home and wanted to become more First Nation culturally informed.

**Elsie**

Elsie looked younger than her 60 years and remained active. Although she sometimes complained of ailments, she endured the day. She was liked by many in her community and knew how to "mind her business." Elsie apparently was a wonderful person to have as a friend. She cared about people, enjoyed talking to them, was respectful, and liked her life. With her good sense of humor, she was easy to talk to and made everyone feel very comfortable around her.

Elsie's home was always open to her children and grandchildren. She tried her best to provide for her grandchildren in ways that enabled the children to live comfortably. Taking care of her grandchildren whenever she had the opportunity was a special joy. Elsie believed in her Native culture and practiced it in her home. She spoke her language fluently and taught her grandchildren how to speak it.

Not much of a traveler, Elsie enjoyed staying at home, but she became involved in community activities whenever she could. She had no problem attending school functions or school visitations.

**Eddy**

Eddy, a very nice boy, was 10 years old. He got along well with most of his peers and had no major discipline problems at home or in school. Eddy enjoyed reading or playing by himself, but he sometimes had friends over to play or sleep. He had been living with his grandmother, whom he loved and respected very much, since he was just a little boy. He called her *Kookum [Cree for grandmother]* instead of *Grandmother*.

Eddy enjoyed school very much and did not have much difficulty doing the work. He was involved in community and school events whenever possible. Eddy was in touch with his culture and spoke his native language a little, although he wanted to learn more of his language and all aspects of his Native culture. Although he was involved in

dancing during the powwow in the community, Eddy did not travel very much therefore did not attend very many other powwows. His desire was to travel more if he could.

**Bill**

Bill was a quiet man and very knowledgeable in Native culture; he especially knew a great deal about hunting and trapping. He respected wildlife and hunted for survival purposes only. He did not believe in destroying animal life just for the sake of enjoyment. Most of the activities that he enjoyed took place outdoors, especially riding his all-terrain vehicle and just enjoying the days.

Bill felt that the responsibility for raising the children should be shared by both parents and participated in it with his wife. He was a strong advocate of discipline and respect. His children were very important to him, and he respected them as well as other people in the community. Many of the community members showed mutual respect for Bill. Although he got along well with other people, he avoided many community activities. However, he attended school functions or visitations.

He felt very strongly that education is the answer to the future. He wanted his children to obtain the best education that they could and to learn about his Native culture and language.

**Annie**

Annie was a quiet, gentle, honest person and had a way of making everyone feel special. She was easy to talk to and very respectful, encouraging her children to respect other people by becoming a role model in the community. Annie believed in proper discipline techniques such as sharing of problems with the whole family and arranged gatherings around the table to discuss problems together as a family.

Annie was involved in school functions and visitations. With regard to Native culture, she was a resource person in the community. She was not afraid to share her knowledge and did it frequently. Native culture and language were extremely important

to Annie, and she tried to live them in her home and in the community. She encouraged her children to practice their cultural ways and wanted them to speak their language fluently, a concern that she expressed a number of times.

Annie enjoyed helping young children through counseling and welcoming them into her home, which was very important to her; she exhibited this by keeping her house very tidy.

**Clover**

Clover was 13 and enjoyed the outdoors very much. She liked to be with her friends, and sometimes they spent the night at her house or she stayed at theirs. She was a quiet person with hidden talent. Although not shy, she did not have a "loud" personality. She was very respectful and was respected by her peers. Clover had a pleasant personality and got along well with young and old alike. She was family orientated and loved her siblings very much. She was a wonderful person with whom to spend time.

Clover liked school and enjoyed the work in school. She did her best and was usually at the top of the class. Reading books was a favorite pastime, as well as doing craft work with a Native cultural aspect. As well, Clover took a great deal of pride in wearing her hair in braids. She respected her culture and enjoyed performing in front of an audience, frequently dancing at the powwows, where she would often win the competition. She liked to travel and attended many powwows outside the community.

## Presenting the Themes

As I progressed through the interviews, themes began to emerge. The first noticeable theme, and certainly what became the most common, was Native culture and its importance in education. The participants also mentioned parenting and described how various parenting skills affected the way that their children were able to interact with teachers in the school. Another theme that emerged was the importance of meaningful time spent with children. Still another theme, particularly among the children, was the

importance of friends or peers. Finally, the question of who was responsible for education arose in almost all of the interviews.

## Native Culture and Its Importance

### Native Culture at Home

The parents in this study expressed their concern about tradition and Native culture in the home, school, community, and education; their perceptions of Native culture; and suggestions for restoring identities. The families I interviewed practiced their Native culture in their homes through various means. Annie explained:

> When we smudge,[3] I explain about asking the Creator to help guide us, and we start from the head, to understand better in school and at home; smudge the ears so that we listen better, and ask the Creator to help so that we can listen better; smudge the mouth so that only good things come out of the mouth and to address the heart so that we can have feelings for other people and have more empathy for other children and teachers; and, finally, you smudge the whole body.

Bill said that "when we make an offering, then we have to smudge. Most of my family know about smudging. Sometimes they will ask if I have *wikimasikan*[4] (Cree for fungus). They will give me a cigarette for something in return." Clover commented that she liked to smudge, make outfits, and dance.

Elsie said that the children like to smudge:

> Even the smallest one tries to do what I do. Sometimes I smudge without Eddy present, but when he is at home he takes part. We pray and smudge the kids. I can't tell if they respect it or not. Yeah, they like it. I don't know if they respect it because some kids are too small.

Eddy said, "We do prayers. She [his grandmother] prays when we go to bed." Elsie observed, "I learned more about smudging and prayers from my dad."

---

[3] Smudging is a Native spiritual ritual used when praying or blessing.

[4] *Wikimasikan* is a Cree word meaning fungus. It is a tree growth that is found on willow trees and used by some Native people for smudging.

The people interviewed mentioned respect as part of their Native culture. Bill said, "We talk to Clover about respecting others. She knows that she has to respect and not to be bad." Clayton noted that he smudged, and respected and listened to his family. Loretta said:

> Yeah, I talk to Clayton a lot about respect; yeah, respecting the teachers, even his mom. His mom gets along with him really good. We talk to him a lot about respecting people and how to respect his brothers and sisters.

Annie observed that respect starts at home.

Clover practiced Native dancing; she said, "I like to be able to dance and smudge." Annie agreed: "Yeah, she practices; she goes downstairs sometime to just listen to powwow and round-dance music." Eddy danced and practiced drumming with his uncle. Speaking the Native language was a concern addressed by some of the families. Carl said, "Just learning how to speak the language so I can communicate with my *kookum* and *mosom* [Cree: *grandmother* and *grandfather*, respectively], so I know what they are saying. Or I like just sitting there and listening." According to Elsie, "Eddy can't talk Cree. Sometimes he talks it, but he can't really do it. But he understands when I talk to him in Cree." Darla mentioned that years ago she introduced her son, Carl, to sweats and sweat lodges, with help from the grandparents:

> I suppose I could enforce or make Native cultural things happen more. I've just never really been—like, I just am, like, one of those individualistic people that live for the here and now, not thinking of the future or the past, in the Native cultural aspect anyway, for my children beside, like I said, being in the community and having them acknowledge the language and the tradition.

Loretta felt that the whole family has to agree to bring more Native culture into the home. To her, Native culture was a family thing.

**Native Culture in the Community**

In most First Nation communities, Native culture is a very important aspect of life; and in *Oota*, things are no different. Annie mentioned that Clover did some volunteer work and was involved in other activities such as round dancing, in which she did volunteer work. As well, she was the powwow princess of the school. She represented the community and the school whenever she left the community to do her dancing. Carl enjoyed helping out and trying to learn as much as he could in Native cultural events:

> Watch and learn, like learning how to speak Cree in Cree classes and helping out at sweat lodges, whatever; put rocks and stuff like that; learning the proper technique and the way things are done and that's the way they are.

Both Clayton and Loretta enjoyed the powwows, even though Clayton did not dance. Elsie said that other people in the community help out and make outfits for her grandsons. Someone had made outfits for Eddy twice. Elsie commented, "I go to the powwow here because the other places are too far for me." Darla noted that Carl was not involved in cultural events other than the powwows, but when he was small, a man would have ceremonial sweats in *Oota* that Carl would attend; this was where he received his Cree name:

> Well, actually he was young when he got his Indian name. His cousins received theirs at a ceremony, and Carl wanted it too. He had to present flags[5] and tobacco to the person having the sweat; then he went into the sweat lodge for a long time. It is not as easy as just wanting it; you have to work for it. He also likes to go to round dances in this community.

Eddy liked to listen to the prayers and participating in the smudging and sharing at the powwow.

---

[5] Flags are pieces of cloth that are used for First Nation spiritual offerings in many ceremonies. These symbolic pieces of cloth represent races of the world, an individual's given colors through spiritual ceremonies, or the four directions.

Annie perceived that:

> there are some things that should happen in *Oota*, but I don't think they do. Yeah, I would like to have my children come with me to ceremonies. One thing I would like to see happen is the naming ceremony for my children. Yeah, I would like for sweats too, but we don't have that, and we don't know whom to go to. I didn't think that it is happening in our community.

Bill commented on "the flooding that happens. If everybody would get involved like they should—but some of them don't even care about getting involved."

**Is Native Culture Acknowledged in School?**

The school, having been built in the community, seemed to be a major accomplishment for the community of *Oota*. The people involved in this study agreed that Native culture should be part of the school. Loretta felt that "it is important for Clayton to learn Native culture at school." Elsie suggested that if Eddy learned more of his Native culture at school, he would use it more. According to Annie:

> I think it is important to have Native culture in the school. especially for our Cree language. . . . Yeah, I think it's really important, but I also feel that it's lacking in the school here because that's where Clover is attending right now, and I hope someday that Native culture comes to the school, that they have their smudging to start the day off right with the children. It is important for Clover to understand and for her to speak her language. . . . [Clover wants] native dancing in school; it gives the kids something else to do.

Carl thought that Cree classes were always good. Native culture in school would teach the children "how to be Indian." He said, "To learn about the way things were done in the past history, even missionary schools and stuff like that so you would know about the past." Darla agreed that culture is important in school:

> Yeah, . . . and as I look back, Carl got culture in different sense, like the White culture and Native culture, because he learned the Cree language through the school system. But also he . . . attended Catholic school, so he learned that culture there too; and being in two different environments, he learned two different kind of cultures too.

Loretta said, "My sister teaches my language, but I never contact her [so that] she can send tapes so I can learn my language." Clover wanted to see more Native displays in the hallways and classroom and more teacher involvement with the children in Native cultural activities so that they did not just walk out of the class.

## Native Cultural Identity

The outward expression of Native culture is a way of life for some of the people of *Oota.* The people of this study discussed their concern or perspectives on Native culture and identity. Darla said: "I think Native culture is really important cause it helps with Carl's identity as a Native person, and knowing his roots can be helpful throughout to branch out like a tree." Annie mentioned that Clover Native danced to feel good. Clover said that dancing allowed her to wear Native clothes and to take pride in it.

Darla recalled that:

> as a little boy, Carl was just adamant that he was a cowboy but I would say, 'No, you're an Indian.' He would say, 'No, I'm not an Indian.' But as an older guy he says, 'I'm Indian,' like that's his identity, his life. . . . Well, even when speaking of culture, I remember he would get mad if I told him 'You are an Indian,' but today he is Indian all the way.

Darla believed that it is like the individual's choice to practice his or her Native culture and felt that "it would be positive, because then it cements the identity." She thought that Carl perceived his identity through learning about his own Native culture. Loretta contended, "It is important for Clayton to grow up knowing that he has a Native culture, and I would like to know my Native culture too."

## Native Cultural Perceptions

The people involved in this study shared their perceptions of Native culture. Darla said:

> Culture is language, their way of life like a Native person. I look at my Native culture in a religious sense, like, in the cultural ways; like, you know, by way of sweats and sweat lodges, that kind of stuff. [She continued], Well, culture will

> have to do with beliefs and values, like I said, and teaching children your beliefs in the traditional cultural sense than "That's the way it is." Modeling that way of life will give children a choice. I believe that, religiously or culturally, it is ultimately the person's individual choice on what path they choose to follow, but to be introduced is the parents responsibility. Like, that's all they can do; then let that child or individual decide upon themselves what route they want to follow.

Carl described Native culture as being "aboriginal, attending powwows, watching powwows, going to sweats and sweat lodges and ceremonies." Eddy depicted culture as "Indian people and dancing." Clayton asserted that, without culture, "nobody will listen." Clover believed that Native culture is "dancing, praying, smudging, caring, and listening." Annie said that Native culture includes "taking part in smudging in the morning, and there are times we do smudging in the evening." Bill reported that "there are round dances, powwows, and hunting that I do. Hunting for wild game and living from wild game will teach my children a way of life."

## Parenting

### Parenting Skills

The parents in this study were obviously struggling to determine the most appropriate and operational parenting skills to use with their children. Bill seemed to be a very quiet man but played a significant role in his daughter, Clover's, behavior. He observed that his parenting skills were not as effective now as they were when Clover was younger: "We have to pull her back, sit her down, and explain things to her and give her directions, guide her" to prevent her from making the wrong choices as some of her relatives had.

Elsie too acknowledged that her grandson, Eddy, usually got what he wanted, but not in a mean way; that was how she had raised him: It's different now than when he was a child. I was younger then and was able to spend more time with him." All the participants mentioned that using parenting skills when the children are younger is easier than when they start to get older. Clayton had been in Loretta's care for 10 years, and

when he stayed with her, he was in bed by nine o'clock. "But at their mom's they get to stay up until three or four a.m." Then Loretta had to get him "back on track" so that he could function in her home.

Darla said:

> I provide the guidance in his [Carl's] honesty, the values of our belief system; and our values are, honesty is the best policy, not to steal, and how to be a good man. Basically that's how I guide him to hopefully be a contributing member to society verses the stereotypes that single parents don't raise contributing members. So with him I provide the guidance that would [allow him to] make good choices and travel the right roads.

Carl remembered that:

> most Easters my mother would wake up early, and she would hide Easter eggs in our front yard. She would leave me a treasure map of, "Where do you park your bike all the time?" There would be an Easter egg sitting on my bike tire. And "Where does the heat come to our house?" I would find eggs by the diesel tank. These things build a person's character, but as you get older you learn and take along the way many of your own habits.

Elsie declared that she had never hit Eddy; she just shouted at him because she did not believe in hitting children. She said that:

> I started raising him because his mother was unfit to look after him. He is a good boy, and many people tell me that I did a good job raising him so far. Sometimes when he is playing his game, he plays it in his room, and we don't even see him all day long, only at night: "Come eat your supper." "Yeah, just wait." We have to wait for him now, and his food is cold. I put his food in the microwave, and he takes his food to his room, and we don't see him for the rest of the night.
>
> Today I'm not raising just him. The others are smaller, and sometimes Eddy gets jealous over them because I had raised him alone. He is a loner, and sometimes he can get mean.

Elsie commented that she:

> didn't have time to go to school or anything. I didn't have time to go to the mission because I had to raise my brothers and sisters, send them to school, because my dad used to go to work quite a bit. I don't really go anywhere now; I'm too tired. I like my grandchildren, and I don't want to be mean to them, so they understand me when I tell them what to do.

**Who Is Responsible for What?**

Many households encounter endless disputes on members' responsibilities; the families that I interviewed were no exception: The parents were responsible for the needs of their children. Darla commented:

> My favorite thing about being a single parent is having the independence and choices of making sole decisions for my children, but the drawbacks are when I need support like when they are sick or something like that. But other than that, I enjoy the role as a single parent because it's my responsibility to ensure their needs are met and that I'm taking care of them in all aspects. He's [Carl's] always been a nice kid to other people. He is friendly, outgoing, and he enjoys horseback riding, rodeo, and baseball, all sports, especially hockey. It was his major love throughout his life. As a matter of fact, he still likes it, but he also likes to golf. He makes me proud, especially when he graduated from military school, which was his choice to attend. Doing the things that are right for him makes him who he is.
>
> Carl didn't have to follow too many rules, just basic stuff like cleaning or placing dishes in the sink after meals, placing his clothes in the laundry and help out with things around the house. When he was a teenager, he had a list of chores to do, but today I am a little more lax with my younger child.

Darla had traveled with her son when he was small, but because he was involved in so many sports, he was able to travel more than she had as a child. Darla's children always had to let her know where they were going and to communicate with her if they later decided to go somewhere else. If they were all away from the house, they decided on a meeting place and time.

Elsie said:

> After school I watch my grandkids. I work hard and cook for them. They have a snack after school, then they go play outside. I start to get supper for them, and I feed them supper, and they play outside. I feel like I work all day long twenty-four hours a day. . . . I clean my house, then it gets dirty, and I have to clean it again and look after the kids. Eddy has to take out the garbage and help out around the house. When he was smaller he used to go to bed around nine or ten p.m., but now that he is older he is usually in bed before me, around eleven p.m.

Elsie said that Eddy listened and stayed around the house or went to the neighbors' house, and she never had to worry about him not coming home on time. Many parents felt that they had no control over their children's bedtimes when they slept over at

felt that they had no control over their children's bedtimes when they slept over at friends' or relatives' homes. This usually occurred on weekends, but there were times that it happened on school nights as well.

Bill and Annie mentioned that Clover's bedtime was nine-thirty or ten p.m. Bill said:

> she usually helps with the chores: first, help clean the house, and if she wants something, she usually asks her mom if she needs any help with anything. If she cannot get what she wants, she gets a little upset. But we talk to her and let her know that what she wants we would try to get for her another time, and she understands. Sometimes she fights with her brother, and after timeout they have to come and apologize for their behavior towards us and to each other.

Bill mentioned that there was no smoking allowed in his house, and even Annie went outside if she wanted to smoke. It was important for Bill that all the family members abide by this rule.

Loretta reported that Clayton was in bed by nine p.m.:

> He has to clean his own area where he sleeps, no running around in the house, and no hollering, including me. As a family we all share the same responsibilities as Clayton. We all have to clean the yard together. We say our prayer in the morning at breakfast time—the prayers of the Western culture and not of the Native culture.

The parents asserted that their children had to do chores around the house to earn rewards.

**Means of Gratification**

As a child, doing things around the house on your own usually means obtaining a reward or gratification of some kind. Darla stated:

> I think my son is grateful for anything he's gotten. He values clothes and sports equipment, the name-brand kind of stuff. He really wanted that because it was like status too with his friends, because he really appreciated it for the appearance of it. He did not want to look like a poor kid with hand-me-down hockey equipment at practices. He always wanted the best, and he continues to be like that. He wants the brand-name stuff, but he knows that he had to earn things too, so he appreciated what he got. He is a source of pride for me, academically

> speaking. He brought home good report cards. In some lower grades he won the perfect attendance award and won his own bike and a helmet, a T-shirt and sweat pants. That was because he went to school every day and had a better chance to win the prize, but he also benefited by getting a good education.
>
> Carl would earn things through his academics. For example, I would give him money for his A's, and then with that money he would buy whatever he wanted. This is how he learned the value of money and what things that he can buy with it.

He particularly liked to buy hockey equipment or other sport equipment. Carl said that he did chores and worked hard in school for the money to buy hockey sticks and other equipment: "I would shovel the driveway, whatever, and got just about everything I needed." The parents felt that their children should *earn* everything they wanted, not be *given* it by the parents.

Annie and Bill gave Clover an allowance for the chores that she did, and she would save her allowance for the things that she wanted: "If she wants something and it's not there or we can't get it, she would get a little disappointed, but most of the time she is very understanding." Annie described Clover's behavior as always good, and she usually obtained whatever she worked towards. Clover usually listened and behaved in order to earn rewards.

Elsie said that:

> Eddy gets what he wants; that's how I raised him. But sometimes it gets difficult to buy what he wants. I tell him that it is too expensive; for example, the Pokémon game he wants is over $100, and I tell him I can't afford it, but I will try to buy it next month. He gets mad a little but gets over it, and the next month he'll ask me again. He keeps asking me what day it is because he waits for family-allowance day. So I charged it up at the store, and I told him I would get one, so he can stop bothering me. He is a good kid and doesn't want everything. He knows if he is bad he doesn't get anything.

**Educational Experiences**

The parents involved in this study realized that education is an essential aspect of their way of life. They shared their experiences with their children to make them understand the benefit of staying in school. Both Annie and Bill shared their schooling experiences honestly willingly. Annie asserted:

> A good education starts right from birth, and the first teachers are the parents. It starts at home and carries on year round. . . . For me, I talk to her [Clover] about how it was for me. I didn't have a good education. I explained to her, and I was honest. I didn't have support at home. How it was for me in them days, there was a lot of alcohol, drugs, and violence in my home when I was growing up. I think she knows how it was for me, and it is so different today. That is why she has to know how it was. I went to school all over, really. I was in a residential school for two years; then I was in a foster home and went to school in the town next to us. I went to school here and there, wherever my step-dad worked. Therefore I was behind quite a bit. But school was a happy place for me, but it was dysfunctional at home, and I couldn't get ahead.

Bill commented:

> I talk to her [Clover] about education. I've never finished mine, and I'm having a tough time now. Thanks to some of the skills I had learned that help me now. I also think of all the traveling I used to do that took her out of school, and it didn't help her at all. I tell her that education is important, and I don't want her to be like most of the teenagers in the community and be a dropout. I don't want my kids to be like that, because I never finished school.

Elsie felt that Eddy needed an education:

> I didn't go to school much, but Eddy needs to, because when I'm not around he will need to go on his own and go to work. I would like to see him go on to complete his schooling, and I would not stop him because I know what it is like not to have much education.

Loretta told Clayton that school was strict when she attended. Darla explained:

> In a more positive sense though, that's how I would tell him of my school experiences—the positive teachers I had in my life and not much hooky playing. Attending school was not important to me when I was young, not as important as it is today. Carl sees that, and there isn't much to my school years except going to school occasionally, being the teacher's pet, but hardly getting into trouble.

**Discipline**

Good parenting involves discipline. Darla recalled:

> Basically my discipline technique, especially when they were small, if I had to use a threat like, "I'm going to take out the wooden spoon," that would be enough to scare them. It was not physical, but if they didn't listen, I would get the spoon. But it was basically more of a threat. . . . My tone of voice helps me a lot; they know when I'm serious. I ask usually two or three times, "Can you do this?" and if they don't move, I usually raise my voice, and it gets done. If something is done wrong, I withdraw privileges; for example, grounding them from the phone or ground them at home. I take things away that they like for discipline.

Bill said:

> We give them time out. If they are bad, they are arguing or fighting with each other, we give them time out in the room for at least fifteen minutes or longer. If it really gets out of hand, they stay in there longer until they settle down and cool off.

Annie added: "There is not much restrictions, like, you know, but as we go along we come up with new ones." Clover confirmed: "I get time out and get sent to my room and think abut what I have done, then come back out and apologize to my brother and parents for my behavior." Most of the children were given time out for bad behavior and sent to their rooms. However, Loretta kept Clayton by her side her for the duration of his time out. Clayton said, "I learn not to do it again, but sometimes I'm sent to bed instead of getting time out." Elsie shouted at Eddy, but not often, because either he listened to her or he was sent to his bedroom by himself. Eddy said that "sometimes she will tell me to clean up and sends me to my room." Whatever the procedure, positive discipline is an important aspect of parenting.

**Closeness as a Family Value**

The families in this study exhibited their values throughout the study. These families portrayed genuine caring and concern about their children through their voices, facial expressions, and mannerism. They expressed their kindness and closeness toward

their children through their daily way of life. They expressed how important their children were and how they try to teach the family values to their children. The children and adults were polite and cooperative. Bill emphasized that nobody was allowed in their home under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and Annie added, "Laughter is something that we like to have." The parents felt that family is very important and that each individual must feel a part it. Elsie commented, "Eddy is not the type of kid that will open up. I try to talk to him, but he talks only when he wants to, and I love him like he was my own kid." Eddy acknowledged that he knew that his grandmother loved him "because she always kisses me."

Throughout this study I noticed that respect played an important role in the families' lives. Clover said that "we respect each other, and my parents earn the respect that they get from my friends." Loretta sometimes recognized behavior problems when Clayton returned from visiting his mom. Her foster children sometimes said that they did not have to listen to Loretta because she was not their mother, but through time they get back on track. She said, "I don't like it when the child has to leave," especially if the child was there since he or she was small. "It takes time getting over it." Carl appreciated the openness and honesty that his mother had taught him as pretty much all he needed in life, and it would take him a long way. The thing that he liked about his mother was

> her stubbornness, because our honesty and openness towards each other builds and builds a good relationship between us, and we just end up talking all the problems out. We get it out of our system so we are not carrying excess baggage.

Parenting is a very difficult job.

## Types of Meaningful Time

I spoke to an Elder about the term *meaningful time*, and he explained that in Cree the term would be *mistahi ispitawitwkway tipahikan*, which would be considered as very important or meaningful time. This is the type of time that I mean by using *meaningful*.

**Fun Meaningful Time**

For the families meaningful time comes in many packages or many ways. The families in this study too have experienced different quality times with their children and as a family. Elsie used to take her grandson to places that she had enjoyed going when she and Eddy were both younger. Now that they were both older and had different interests, they usually spent their fun time separately. She said when Eddy was young,

> he liked to go swinging in the park. He use to go swimming too. I would take him to restaurants like Kentucky Fried Chicken for lunches. We would sometimes go to the park just for walks. The only thing that I never did with him is to take him to the movies. I don't like to go to movie theaters. Now he goes next door or plays games in his room.

Darla said that " in the summer we like to go bike riding together, and we sometimes go visiting. We don't go visiting too much." Carl mentioned that he just sits down and talks, and they spend time together, sometimes playing cards, and added: "When I was younger there was a lot of rodeo, hockey, and other sports; but today I do my own thing and she does hers. But the closeness of talking and honesty is still there."

The families saw the meaningful fun times seeming to drift away as the years went by, but Loretta still played with Clayton on the balcony and in the living room. She continued:

> In the winter we usually go skating down the river. We make a fire and have a wiener roast. Other things that we do for fun is sliding, baseball, hockey, and swimming. The whole family usually just goes down sliding, and my son and his wife and their boy will go down too.

Bill observed, "Sometimes when I go play baseball, Clover will come with me. Another thing that we like to do is play board games."

**Educational Meaningful Time**

Most of the meaningful time for education occurs during homework or parent-teacher interviews and school involvement. Darla's meaningful time with her children was spent "during homework time that we have been doing throughout the years. We do that in the evening, and we make sure we do all our homework." With Carl's homework,

> I basically help him with his English sentence structure and how to write the body and introduction of essays. I just give him support and help him with his work. I make sure they do their homework, and I always ask them, "Do you have any homework tonight?" So we sit together doing our homework because I have been an adult student too.

Elsie remembered Eddy as a small child when she used to read to him at night or during the day:

> He liked to read and color, but he especially liked books. But today he doesn't read as much; maybe he read too many books when he was small, I don't know. He doesn't get much homework at all. I ask him, "Do you have any home work?" But he says that he never gets it. I can't remember who helped him with his homework when he brought it home. I know that I never helped him.

Eddy explained that his mother or the mother of his friend next door sometimes helped him with his homework.

Loretta became involved with Clayton's school by going to meetings to discuss problems, or "phoning the school to see if she could help if he was having problems." If Clayton brought homework home, everybody in the house helped him when he had difficulty. Clayton added, "When I have trouble with social studies, my foster mother helps me, but not with my math, and I enjoy her help." Carl mentioned that the small classroom size in the band-operated school was good for learning because students did not have to wait for the teacher to help them. The student-teacher ratio was good, and the small classrooms were ideal.

### Productive Meaningful Time

Productive meaningful time involves families spending time together that results in some kind of outcome. Annie recollected:

> When Clover was small and we were making her first Native dress, she helped me with the jingles. It was her first jingle dress. She helped me with the color, and she liked the color purple. My mother gave her some lace and she wanted to put it on her dress.

Bill also remembered: "When she was small, I would brush my beaver pelts (that were brought in from the trap-line), and she would come running and say, 'Beaver, beaver,' and she would sit down and brush the pelts too." He would take his children out to teach them hunting and surviving on wild game or to visit their grandparents and other relatives. He said:

> I used to spend a lot with Clover when she was young, but not so much now that she is getting older. She used to try and dress like me or get clothes like mine. She used to wear longjohns; she wanted to wear what her dad wore.

Annie stressed that communication was important during supper times: "We would talk together and see how everybody is doing." Elsie usually went shopping with her grandson when he was younger, mostly on the weekends, but now she allowed him to stay home if he wanted to. Eddy said that "she takes me to round dances and go visit around, and she takes me shopping too." Loretta had kissed Clayton at bedtime since he was small: "We'd hug and kiss good night." Now "he is the kissy type: kiss good morning, kiss good afternoon, and kiss good night."

## The Importance of Friends

### Time Spent With Friends

Friends are important, especially to young people, and this sentiment was expressed by the children. Clayton liked to work on his computer and participate in physical education activities so that he could be with his friends. He usually did not sleep

over at friends' homes when he stayed at his foster home, but he did when he visited his mother. Annie said that:

> Clover spends time teaching her friends how to powwow dance. She plays her music, and they dance. Sometimes her friends will come and sleep over. It is not enough to spend time at school with your friend, but spending time with your friend at home is different.

Clover commented that she liked school because she could spend time there with her friends: "When my friends are with me we jump on the trampoline, play my Nintendo 64, ride the all-terrain vehicle, and watch TV." Most of the time you would see her at school with one of her friends; she was alone very seldom. She was very polite and always acknowledged me in school. She would never forget to wave. She always treated her friends with kindness.

Elsie remembered that when Eddy was small, he used to take his toys into his room and not allow any of his friends to play with them. Now he played indoors with video games, and his friends would to do the same. Elsie observed, "He is not like a normal kid; you know, for him to play outside with the other kids. He doesn't like to play with bad kids, only good kids." Eddy said that:

> we just go to the room to play games or something. I don't let my friends do everything in the house. I respect my *kookum*. . . . When the kids want to do something, I take them outside. I like to go to my friends', listen to music, play my video game, or watch TV.

Elsie said that Clayton "treats his friend like he was his own brother. They even go to Edmonton together sometimes."

**Variation of Friends**

Friends do not necessarily live in your area; they can be found almost anywhere. Bill mentioned that Clover had lots of friends. She spent time sleeping over at her many cousins' houses because most of her friends were her cousins, but she had other friends as well who were not related. When one of her friends moved to Fort McMurray, she

phoned her and kept in touch. Most of her friends were younger than she was, and they looked up to her in many ways. It was nice to see the bond that she had with her sister. Her sister was her role model, and she admired her sister the way that her younger friends looked up to her.

Darla said that not all of Carl's friends were Native, and they were not all in his class. He had many older friends as well. He did not associate with just Natives because he attended different schools. He learned to appreciate the diversity of people and their culture, and having a variety of friends helped him to view the world with a positive attitude. Carl mentioned that he had spent a few of his Christmases with friends out of town. Most of Clayton's friends were from *Oota*, but two of them were from out of town. Few of his friends visited him at his foster home, but he saw them in school.

**Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure in many school communities is a subject that needs to be addressed. The students try to deal with it on their own. Darla said:

> I think what he [Carl] really needed was, first of all, the choice of friends that he made. I had to guide him with the friends that he made. I believe that the friends you have as a child, those are the ones that influence you in what you do and what you think, and a lot of times that's where my guidance was.

Carl felt that he was likable and popular in school. Elsie was concerned that:

> sometimes Eddy's friend doesn't go to school, and he doesn't go to school either. I say, "Why you have to miss school, because your friend doesn't go? You better go to school. "Tomorrow, tomorrow," he said. "I have nobody to play with up there [the out-of-town school]. Even when his friend goes to Edmonton, he gets lonesome; he wants to cry when he leaves. When he was small he never really had that many friends. Today he doesn't want to play with bad kids, and his friends always stay at home too. That is why I'm not scared for him to go out, because I know how he is. That is something that I'm not worried about. He really wanted me to buy him a game to take to school, because many of the students bring their games to school.

Loretta said that "Clayton has friends in school, and that's all she knows about." Annie noticed that Clover was a role model to her friends and that she liked school because of her friends. She was involved in a community activity at the school, and she seemed to be enjoying herself very much. You could see that her friends meant a great deal to her. The bond was visible because she looked confident at what she was doing on the stage. The fact that her friends waited for her cue on the next dance move indicated her leadership qualities, and her friends looked up to her as a role model.

### Who Is Responsible for Education?

Education is an issue that concerned many of the parents. In this study the parents did not all agree on who was responsible, but rather they stated that *someone* was responsible for education. Elsie thought the responsibility belonged to the Chief and Council of the Band because they paid the expenses, and she did not see the responsibility for education belonging to teachers. Loretta feels that the school and parents were responsible for education. Darla affirmed that good education would probably first come from the home because that was where children learn the most regarding life skills. She went on to say that teachers guide students as individuals and as scholars and that they help them achieve goals and reach their potential academic level. Carl maintained that

> the small-mindedness of the Chief and Council involvement ruins the whole atmosphere of having a band-operated school. The teachers change and everything else so much that there is no routine with the kids. It is like starting over again and again every year [when] they change the teachers.

## Educational Concerns

The families were all very concerned about education, particular the lack of a good education. The concerns ranged from courses, little homework, lack of communication, and home visits. Loretta said that:

> Clayton has no homework, but lately the teacher has been sending his work home. He hasn't been doing his work, and I didn't know this. The teacher didn't know my phone number but the principal knows my number. She should have gotten hold of me a long time ago. But he doesn't bring homework home; only the other children do, but they go to a different school. She brings homework every night.

Darla remarked:

> I suppose if my child was having problems, I would like to see them, but if he's not having any problems—it would be kind of nice to have better communication, I think, with the school. For example, if your kid is late, they don't even phone or check. These guys here don't even care if your kid goes to school or not. I don't even get home visits from this school here.

Elsie acknowledged that she hardly ever went to the school except for parent-teacher interviews, but she felt that the school staff should come to see her and find out how she feels about the education that Eddy was receiving.

Carl addressed the need for a variety of classroom activities and options in school, such as shop and welding; however, he felt that the basic classes were there to help him to learn. Carl's concern echoed that of many of the upper-grade students.

# CHAPTER V

# DATA ANALYSIS

> Part of our spiritual path involves learning to see our struggles in life as teachers: we do this by utilizing honesty and kindness. (Bellerose, 1997, workshop Presentation)

After the data are collected, sorted, and organized, the task of data analysis and interpretation takes place. For the purposes of this study I have decided to separate the two, but in reality they are interdependent. Data collection ceases not because the information has been depleted, but because time or other factors need to be taken into consideration.

The data collected will be used to generate ideas for analysis. I will present the data in an honest and sincere manner. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) affirmed that "in the end the aim of analysis is to move from accounts of what people do and say as description of their worlds, to how and why they do what they do and say what they say" (p. 77).

## Cultural Paradigms

According to Linton (1963), "Culture may be defined as the sum total of the knowledge, attitudes and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society" (p. 466). Culture can be defined differently by various groups or individuals. To First Nation people culture also includes spirituality and is a very important aspect of their way of life. This Native culture and its attributes form the roots of the background. Observing Native culture at home, such as praying, smudging, and sharing as a family unit, affords a sense of individuality and self-worth, which seems to help children to achieve higher academically in school. Native culture is a basic human trait for First Nation people, and demonstrating cultural practices at home fosters those practices throughout future generations.

Respect is a very important attribute of Native culture. Berns (1997) explained that

> children are taught to respect Elders (age is a badge of honor—if you have grown old, you have done the right things). Traditionally, it is the old people who pass on the cultural heritage to the young ones. Respect is taught by example as well as by instructions. (p. 172)

Respect has to be reciprocal in order for it to grow. It is imperative that respect be taught at home. Respecting one's parents, siblings, surroundings, and the environment creates a healthy and holistic individual. I observed that many First Nation children in this community lacked respect. It is my perception that many of them do not experience their Native culture in the home. The families that I interviewed had all made respect a focal point in their teaching of Native culture at home. Before children can learn, they must know who they are.

Encouraging First Nation children to participate in Native dancing and crafts and to learn their Native tongue fosters their self-image and sense of origin. Language is by far the most essential facilitator of understanding one's heritage, behavior, and other social attributes (Berns, 1997; Wub-e-ke-niew, 1995; Wyrostok, 1997). Observation of Native culture helps to keep it alive and promotes taking charge of one's destiny. First Nation children might not continue to practice their Native culture in the future, but they still have the foundation set for them by their parents, which later might inspire them to teach their own children their culture. Native culture is sometimes learned outside the home, but it is hoped that eventually the whole family will become involved in its practice. Native culture in the home is just as important as Native culture in the community.

Most First Nation communities have annual round dances, powwows, and even workshops to enhance their Native culture. The community that I studied was no exception. Community cultural functions can bring people together; but, [my perception

is that] unfortunately, this togetherness does not spill over to other areas such as the workplace, school, health services workplace, or even into some families.

According to what my uncle told me, years ago people could not function unless they believed and participated in genuine community spirit. For example, he told me stories of how his whole Native community shared the hunting expeditions and the results of the hunt. Each family unit would receive sections of meat to take home to feed their families. Berns (1997) concurred that "the function of the community, then, is to provide a sense of belonging, friendship, and socialization of children" (p. 63). To enhance this community spirit, Native communities need more involvement such as helping each other out in times of need, visiting relatives or friends, volunteering more, and helping to guide the children. We, Native people, need to be proud of our heritage and work together to create a healthy cultural community for future First Nation children.

It is my experience that people who come from outside to work in the Native community need to feel that they belong to the community too by getting to know the people as individuals and allowing attitudes and influences to intertwine over a period of time. It is their [outside people] responsibility to take the initiative to participate in the community as though they are part of a team. It seems to me that open communication and participation by all parties is not stressed enough and does not allow for a "partnership" to emerge (Lareau, 1987). There needs to be more encouragement for genuine participation from people inside and outside the community.

Outside communities can provide more stimulation for Native people to absorb and retain culture. The families go outside the community for Native cultural events. However, having Native cultural events in a community is valuable, but the knowledgeable people needed to facilitate various events are usually found outside this community, and funding can be a problem. Therefore, many communities share their knowledge within the community and invite outside people to attend. It is this

involvement that binds the First Nation communities together, especially if the distance between communities is not too great.

Children need to be loved, nurtured, cared for, respected, educated, and imbued with a sense of their culture. It is this cultural or home background that guides them into the outside world and helps to create a unique individual in a positive or a negative way. Generally, the negativity overwhelms the positivity in most situations. Hirschfelder (1982) contended that "it should come as no surprise that Indian children who constantly see their people stereotyped or treated in unfair ways grow into adults who begin to feel and act as if they were not as good as other people" (p. x).

Many Native children are influenced by outside media and the school environment. In First Nation communities a great deal of responsibility is placed on band-operated schools to reinstate or integrate Native culture within the curriculum. Hirschfelder (1982) explained that "in schools, children read social studies text that portray Indians as obstacles to progress or incidental to the entire course of American history." She continued, "Most routinely see silly or ferocious Indians in their story books and play with toys that demean important aspects of Indian culture" (p. xi).

Today textbooks are more censored for direct stereotyping and are geared toward a positive perspective of Natives. However, parents can misguide or influence their children's background based on their previous experience with stereotypical textbooks involving Natives in the educational establishments. Parents feel that schools play an important role in teaching culture, and they rely on schools to do the teaching for them. Although the parents I interviewed have taken the initial step of teaching some of the Native culture at home, they realized that they could teach only what they had learned through their parents and relatives. It is the traditional teachings that have been lost or have changed dramatically.

The parents mentioned that missionary schools played a significant role in their loss of culture. Wyrostok (1997) articulated that "removing the children from the

'heathen' influences of their parents was thought to be the most effective route toward religious conversion" (p. 25). These harsh and barbaric practices forbid First Nation people from following the cultural path set out by their ancestors. Wyrostok stated that "children were removed for most of the year from the guidance and teaching of their parents and raised in barracks-like setting where nuns and priests or brothers directed their activities" (p. 25). These children had no role models and raised their own children with a lack of parenting skills. Wyrostok, emphasized that "parental role models were not available nor could children learn from their own mothers and fathers how to assume this most pivotal and critical social role: the parent" (p. 25). Whitehead and Hayes (1998) concluded that

> culture is passed on from generation to generation, but it is not static; it is dynamic—that is, it is not passed on by one generation in exactly the same form that it was received. Some aspects of culture are changed or modified as a result of the experience of the previous generation. (p. 79)

Most First Nations' culture was stripped away within mission schools.

Wub-e-ke-niew (1995) criticized "the United States government policies which created the compulsory-education schools as a tool to cultural annihilation" (p. 115). These "compulsory" schools were represented by mission schools or boarding schools managed by different religious denominations. In the area from which my Native people come, the Catholic church is the dominant religion. In my opinion, the Catholic church has had a negative influence on its declared beloved people, First Nation people, and today they [First Nation people] need a great deal of support. Berns (1997) cautioned that "when families are not empowered and become victims of the consequences of changes they may experience stress, disillusionment, or an unanticipated lifestyle. They are at risk of becoming unhealthy or dysfunctional" (p. 100).

When the residential schools closed and most of the First Nation culture was virtually destroyed, many families became dysfunctional. Residential schools used

prohibition of the Native language as a weapon to abolish the Native culture. Wyrostok (1997) stated that "eliminating a language has long been a key process in the elimination of culture" (p. 26). We can thus assume that the practices of residential schools contributed to many of the addictions that penetrated First Nation communities. We can also suggest that these residential schools caused many families to become dysfunctional. These dysfunctions include alcohol and drug addictions; gambling, such as bingos and casinos; lack of parenting skills; low self-esteem and self-worth; and very little knowledge of culture. Whitehead and Hayes (1998) recognized that "there is little doubt that alcoholism is an integral part of a dense causal web that involves serious negative impacts on many First Nation communities in Canada" (p. 57). Wyrostok (1997) affirmed that

> the trauma of losing their land, languages, spiritual leaders, family units and roles in the community has had the cumulative effect of leaving many First Nations people in alcoholism, despair, and grief. It is this trauma—not alcoholism—which underlies the difficulties faced in First Nation communities. (p. 29)

Hence the loss of identity of the children from these families.

It is very difficult to realize a sense of identity if the dysfunction in a family is not attended to or recognized. According to Berns (1997), "While young people are trying out many roles, which is a normal process, they may be unable to choose an identity or make a commitment, and so will not know who they are or what they may become" (p. 48). It is almost crucial to include some type of cultural influence in a First Nations way of life. Lack of Native culture at home or at school can result in "identity diffusion" (p. 25) and little desire to achieve academically.

Children who have a sense of identity through immersion in some culture tend to strive to achieve higher standards in school. This requires more in-depth study focusing on the subject of cultural identity and school achievement, which is beyond the scope of this study, although the community which I examined certainly presented evidence of the

need for further study. The existence of a sense of identity allows more of a focus on the academics, and a First Nation child who has experienced culture at home, in the community, and at school becomes a "whole" child with a positive self-image who is able to function emotionally, socially, and spiritually in both worlds (Native and non-Native). The families I interviewed felt that Native cultural practice in the home contributes to a sense of identity, but I also noticed that the perception of Native culture varied among the families involved in the study.

I found that these families were modeling a sense of Native culture in the home without realizing it, and that their perception of Native culture was more Westernized. The families described Native culture as a tangible concept. It is important to recognize that there are various perceptions of Native culture and none that are true or false, they are all honest perceptions. Native culture can be shared and spread through modeling. For example, the parents said that Native culture involves powwows, round dances, smudging, praying, ceremonies, and crafts; and some also mentioned values. This is the Native culture that has been identified by the Western society for a number of decades. It is the only Native culture that has been known to First Nation people for many years because their traditional concept (practices and rituals taken from First Nation knowledge) of Native culture was redefined in many ways; therefore, in my opinion, these might be considered different cultural perceptions. If these concepts are being used today to foster Native culture, then we need to address the idea of sharing. For example, ceremonies must be kept sacred, and it must be understood that they are not to be exploited.

My perception of Native culture was not always what it is now. It took many years of life experiences and many encounters with influential people such as my parents, siblings, relatives (especially my uncle), friends, and various elders. I learned that Native culture is within a person: It is the way you think, the way you behave toward people, animals, and the environment. Native culture is showing respect and being honest and

kind to any living thing. Native culture is learning how to balance between negative and positive in anything that happens around you. Native culture is knowing what is enough and being satisfied with it in anything that you do. Native culture is forgiving and accepting the weaknesses of others and showing empathy and understanding. Native culture is knowing that there is a greater power than you and that you are never separated from your loved ones; they will always guide you if you believe in them. Native culture is listening, which most children and parents neglect or eliminate in their way of life. A child is endowed with the gift of listening from the beginning of his or her life, but a child might stop listening because of something that has happened to him or her. Then this child might begin to stop caring, feeling, relating, and respecting. Today there are many children who are listening to the wrong message because of past experiences, and many of them are in jails, in juvenile homes, on the street, taking drugs, rebelling, and so on.

Native culture is taking care of your body because it is the temple for your spirit. When your temple is abused through of societal conflicts, your spirit becomes damaged and needs to be nurtured. The spirit of First Nation children is at stake and needs to be nurtured back to health so that it can reside peacefully in its temple. I feel that First Nation people have done well to survive thus far because of what they have had to endure. It is with these concepts of traditional culture that we strive to make a better world for First Nation children. In order to produce "whole" children, we must parent them by modeling traditional culture and making sure that we take care of the mind, body, and spirit.

## Parenting Struggles

The families that I interviewed seemed to have good parenting skills but observed that parenting is not an easy task. Parenting cannot occur without guidance, and these parents had had very little guidance in their own childhoods. Berns (1997) confirmed that

"parental values and attitudes about what is important and appropriate are reflected in their parenting styles" (p.169). The level of education attained by the parents is a critical factor in how the child performs in the educational system (Douglas, 1964; Duran, 1983). Predominantly, it is the mother's influence that has greater influence (Douglas, 1964). These parents emphasized that involvement in the child's world enhances the positive self-image of the child. This involvement needs to take place when the child is young and should continue as long as the child needs it, usually well into adolescence. Douglas concluded that "parents who give their children the most encouragement in their school work also give them the best care in infancy" (p. 54). In First Nation communities, the involvement or encouragement tends to cease as the child gets older, which is a problem that needs attention. First Nation children tend to try to make decisions on their own after a certain age, and dependence on family begins to be challenged. Parents must provide guidance through trust and honesty; these parenting skills are cherished and demonstrated in future generations.

All children need encouragement from parents to acquire a sense of pride in self. Children in First Nation communities are raised with values similar to those of most non-Natives. Children are expected to do their share of the work around the home, and they are compensated accordingly. As I have learned from my study, responsibilities in the family are distributed throughout the family by the authoritative parent (either gender). Baumrind (1990) emphasized that "authoritative parents provide firmness in direction with some freedom to pick and choose by the child—although the limits are usually set for the child by the parent" (p. 4). Most of the time the child makes decisions at the family level. I found that the socioeconomic level of the family did not have a major influence on decision making. Each family maintained a strong sense of accepting responsibility and of bringing pride to the household. The children of these families did not take things for granted. Berns (1997) explained that "influences on moral development are parenting methods such as reasoning and modeling, experiences in

social interaction and role taking, opportunities to democratically make rules and group discussions on moral dilemmas" (p. 515).

The families satisfied their children's needs whenever possible. The things that the children wanted were usually obtainable if they excelled academically. Parents were willing to negotiate with the child in order to satisfy their needs.

The children's school experiences differed from those of their parents. Parents shared stories of school experiences as a tool to encourage their children to remain in school. Most of these stories depict the hardship or contrasting home issues of attending school. In the past attendance at school was not as important as it is today. In order to maintain an adequate standard of living, many First Nation students should strive to achieve a higher standard of education than their parents did. Parents with low achievement levels can contribute to their children's lack of achievement (Duran, 1983). Some example of fostering success in school are teaching a child cognitive skills, reading to a child at an early stage, and teaching children methods of problem solving (Duran, 1983). McCarthy (1971) reported that "when the educational achievements of parents and their children were compared (in a study of Indian dropouts and graduates in Northern Alberta), 5.6 per cent of the parents completed grade eight compared to 70.0 per cent of the children" (p. 63). Today these figures are probably far higher because the effects of residential schools on the current generation are slowly diminishing. In spite of the educational experiences, maintaining a solid plan to control discipline amongst First Nation student is a challenge. Children who are disciplined early in life seem to take more responsibility for the outcome of their education, therefore improving academic achievements, as has been shown through my educational experiences.

Discipline is not only a problem with First Nation students, but it is also a serious problem in many other homes and schools. Parents often enforce discipline in order to maintain peace in the household. Berns (1997) observed that "understanding how parents generally respond to their children's development also enhances one's ability to be an

effective parent" (p. 169). As I conducted my study, I found that the methods of discipline used by the parents were very effective because the parents began disciplining early in the child's life. Their methods included time out and taking privileges away, although some parents used harmless threats and raising of their voices, which would be considered effective methods for them. Discipline is not as effective if enforced later in the child's life, because the child can become confused,angry and rebel.

I found that many of the children in the community had discipline problems. For some of the children, consistency by the parents was lacking. As well, some children were often left alone while parents played bingo, which created a loss of guidance that permeated the community and the schools. Parental guilt often allowed children to control their parents. Some of the children had made decisions such as dropping out of school at a very young age, causing parents and other concerned individuals to aid in solving the problem. These children and their behavior need attention and understanding to enable them to build a solid educational foundation to pursue any path that they desire. Unfortunately, not acknowledging or ignoring these discipline problems could have a detrimental effect on academic achievement. For example, attendance could fluctuate, disrespect of teachers could increase, interest in school or/school work could diminish, and frustrations by the teacher/students could increase. These are only a few of the effects of a lack of discipline by parents.

The families in the study exhibited family values and were proud of the closeness of their families. It is evident that children who feel a sense of belonging do better academically, which the children in this study have demonstrated. The comments in their school records showed that these children have a good sense of belonging and support from the family. Among the families interviewed, there were obvious indications that meaningful time spent with the children was very important.

## Aspects of Meaningful Time

Time is an important element in a First Nation's way of life. Berns (1997) attested that "time is a continuum, with no beginning and no end. Ceremonies for example, begin when the participants are ready rather than punctually at the scheduled time" (p. 287). Because time is so precious, it is important to acknowledge how this time is spent in a First Nation family. Time for relaxing and enjoying being with one's family or with others does not go unnoticed in a First Nation family. The families with whom I worked had various ways of spending meaningful time with their children.

First Nation children should experience fun time within a family; unfortunately, there are many children in dysfunctional homes who seldom indulge in fun time. Fun time can include traveling, attending powwows and sporting events, shopping, and just being together and enjoying time together.

First Nation children also need to experience meaningful educational time within families, and the school can be a big contributor to this type of family time. Schools that do not give homework prevent meaningful educational time in a home. Schools that do not use exciting methods of teaching that involve the parents decrease meaningful time as well. It is important that schools in First Nation communities understand that homework and schoolwork provide a connection from school to child to parent. If that tie is broken, parental involvement is virtually nonexistent. Parents should not cease being interested in their child's education; as the child gets older, the need for encouragement throughout the educational journey becomes even more important.

Spending time communicating with or teaching children is a very realistic task for First Nation parents. With today's fast-paced lifestyle, it is a challenge to find the time or opportunity to teach the child to hunt, bead, or learn the Cree language and other cultural aspects. The children in this study were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to spend productive meaningful time with their parents. It is important to be able to make

time at home to encourage children to pursue their interests. Yawkey and Cornelius (1990) advised that "in strengthening the family and building and maintaining positive interaction, an investment of shared time is critical" (p. 63). Time spent with children can determine their futures and certainly affects academic achievement.

**Relating to Friendship**

Another way of guiding children's future is through their choices of friends. The First Nation students who were involved in the study made it apparent that friends were very important in their lives. In a First Nation community best or close friends almost always are relatives. Cousins might have closer bonds than siblings. I have relatives who are still my closest friends.

Sharing and caring are cultural traits that some of the First Nation children demonstrated with their friends. Most of the time parents accept friends in their homes, and the friends abide by the family rules. Berns (1997) found that "family interaction patterns play a role in children's successful integration into groups or friendship" (p. 362).

I noticed that friendships between students did not necessarily bring the families closer, but that the parents and the child's friend became closer. Friends did not influence bonding between the two families. Usually, however, the families involved were related, which sometimes helps to bond families together.

The children usually chose friends who are similar in personality; for example, those who are quiet, do well in school, or have no behavioral problems. The choices of friends did not necessarily involve Native culture; for example, whether a child was involved in powwow dancing, drumming, or smudging.

The students interviewed did not indicate problems with their peers. Acceptance is an important element that begins within a family and leads to peer acceptance and the ability to make friends (Berns, 1997). I found that students who had fewer problems with

friends and peers tended to do much better academically than did students with friend or peer problems.

## Educational Responsibility and Concerns

In a First Nation community, the responsibility for education seems to lie in different directions and at different department levels. It is important to understand that education is everyone's responsibility. Children, parents, teachers, Chief and Council, and community need to work together as a team to transform the negative perception of schooling into a more positive one. It should be understood that education in a band-operated school must involve culture and should be unique to the needs of the First Nation people residing there. The curriculum should fit the needs of the people instead of having to conform to the requirements of a bureaucratic educational system. Teachers should adjust to fit the situation rather than adjusting the situation to fit the teacher. First Nation schools need teachers who genuinely care for the students' well-being and who are understanding, accepting, and know that they are not there to change the community's or the students' attitudes. They are paid, invited guests who have been given the power to educate the First Nation children. First Nation children are not receiving the quality education they deserve. Unfortunately, today's First Nation children are struggling with the sense of identity or origin which can be contributed from their school experiences.

The power of teachers to mold children needs to be shared with First Nation parents in more of a partnership concept. First Nation parents need to empower themselves to take control of their education system. However, many of the parents and political leaders do not have the necessary education to make major decisions for First Nation children in school. This could be improved by allowing more Elders to impart their knowledge about traditional culture and begin to create a more positive working First Nation educational system.

Communication needs to improve in the school. Communication between teachers and parents is so vital in reaching the goals necessary to produce academic achievers in First Nation communities. It is time for parents to take control of their children's education by getting involved, knowing the curriculum, and being aware of how much Native culture is being taught in the school. How much Native culture is represented in a band-operated school? Parents should be willing and eager to be involved in the education system, because it is their children who will benefit from a brighter future.

# CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

## Introduction

This final chapter will consist of the conclusion, summary of findings, recommendations for future research, recommendations for uses of the study, and reflections of a First Nation researcher.

## Conclusion

As I journeyed into the final stages of the study, I recall my own home and cultural background and how it has affected my academic achievement. It has been the driving force behind my identity as an individual and has paved the way for my accomplishments. My parents' strong parenting skills, beliefs, and Native culture have contributed to my successful academic career.

My struggles in school have guided my sensitivities toward First Nation students' experiences. I have attempted to share with the teaching professional or interested readers my understandings and awareness of First Nation students' home and cultural backgrounds and their effects on academic achievement. However, there has been little research in this area to support my ideas.

Few research articles have been published about other ethnic home and cultural backgrounds and their effect on academic achievement. For example, Duran (1983) confirmed that "only relatively few published studies or publicly available dissertation studies exist on predictions of Hispanics' college grades from high school grades and college admissions test scores" (p. 102), which highlights the specific kind of study that I have undertaken. However, it is my hope that First Nation people will benefit from the research findings of one of their own people.

The methodology that I chose for this study was of a qualitative nature. To present the people as human beings and not as statistics, I used a procedure called *ethnography*, which seemed to be appropriate for this study. Although I was unsure of the protocol, I looked deep into my Native culture to arrive at conclusions that would apply to all the parties involved in this study. I did not want to rely on outside investigators to make conclusions about my Native people. As an inexperienced First Nation researcher, first I had to understand myself and come to know who I am and what my roots are to enhance this study.

The participants that I chose were from four families, and they helped by sharing their eagerness to improve the educational system in which their children were involved. Although the number of families was small, it is hoped that the results will be applicable and of benefit to all types of classrooms. It is important to understand that the parents built the foundation for their children's academic success, although sometimes the children make the wrong decisions. Success is a journey, not a destination, and most people continue on this journey throughout their lives.

## Summary of the Findings

First Nation children can strive academically regardless of whether they come from single-parent, foster-parent, grandparented, or two-parent families. What is crucial is that regardless of the home situation, a number of criteria must be present in order for First Nation children to achieve academically. Some examples include Native culture; positive, early educational experiences; meaningful time spent with the child; parental educational desires; parental educational involvement; positive behavior; and willingness of parents to express their educational concerns.

Before I share the findings of my study, I will restate my research question: *According to the perception of selected First Nation families, how do culture and home*

*backgrounds influence the academic achievement of First Nation students*? The following are the findings of this study:

***1. Perceptions of Native culture***

*Culture* can be defined in many different ways. However, I am more interested in how the families in this study perceived Native culture within the home. The families described Native culture most often as a descriptive, exterior process that leads to acculturation. The Native culture that many practice can be considered internal, but the families did not seem to consider the internal process as Native culture.

Culture is more than a physical concept of hunting and gathering (Bellerose, 1997; Hoffman, 1988; Hollins, 1995; Witt, 1998). Native culture is a way of life, the way you mold yourself and your children to create a human being. These families participated in Native culture in their daily lives in a manner that excluded the paraphernalia associated with Native culture from non-Native society. Asking a child to listen, share, feel, and care is part of culture. Meyers (1998) acknowledged that "listening well is found in the act of focus, and focusing is part of what culture helps to define" (p. 111). The families did not realize or acknowledge that this experience of cultural sharing was occurring among the individuals in the families. Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) emphasized that "the transmission of cultural knowledge and values is at the foundation of problems related to the adjustment and academic achievement of ethnically and linguistically different students" (p. 18). Children who are confused about their Native culture seem to blame themselves or society (p. 22).

Children who embrace culture at home tend to utilize their knowledge within their surroundings (Soldier, 1992). Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) suggested that

> if we argue that cultural compatibility between the home and the school is not necessarily desirable in the formal teaching setting, then we also have to state that not all cultural incompatibilities are undesirable, even though they must be accommodated appropriately in the school. (p. 28)

The educational system can help to enhance the Native cultural values that the children bring to school by acknowledging and accepting that they have been influenced by their home background. When this happens, children excel academically.

***2. Providing early educational experiences for the child helps to promote academic achievement.***

Children who are involved in a family as an integral part become more wholesome and free of the feeling of inferiority. Children need to feel the sense of belonging; this sense creates stability. This sense of belonging or stability promotes the ability to learn. Children need a strong foundation before they attend school. They need to be taught educational concepts such as numbers, letters, and words by their parents in their early childhood years (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Maryland State Department of Education, 1990). In this study the findings reveal that these concepts shared by parents/guardian and child lead to more successful academic achievement as shown in the school records. It is this provision of early educational experiences in young children that sets the stage for greater academic success.

***3. It is important that families spend meaningful time with their children.***

Meaningful time can be experienced in many unique forms. During this study I found that the parents spent time with their children in a number of different ways which may include different aspects of family or home functions. The significant times spent as a family may involve cultural, educational, or relaxation activities, or just having fun. The time that these families spend together enables the children to develop an understanding of the concept of *family*, which contributes to becoming a functional family. The diversity or commonalties of time shared in First Nation families needs further study.

***4. Friends are an important aspect of a child's life.***

Among the families I interviewed, the concept of friends seemed to be important.. The ability to consider relatives as friends was a common concept among the families.

Friends for many of the children resided in the community. Most friends have some influence on academic success (Chen, 1997; Steinberg, 1996). Friends often compete for academic achievement and success (Phelan et al., 1992). Grant, Battle, Murphy, and Heggoy (1997) mentioned that "at times there was some competition but it was positive, resulting in no one looking bad in the other's eye" (p. 25).

School friends seem to remain friends even outside the school environment. The students involve their friends in their daily home life. The "positive value of the friendship entails mutual helping, teaching, and modeling of behavior, offsetting the negative and stressful rather than aggravating it" (MacDonald, 1991, p. 17). Thus, having relatives as friends in a First Nation community should enhance community togetherness.

***5. Parents desire that their children be well educated.***

The parents discussed their concern about their own educational accomplishments. They stated that they wanted their children to have a better chance in life by obtaining a better education, and many of the parents felt that their involvement in the educational system is a way of assisting in their child's education. They have the desire to help their child achieve a higher standard of education than they did. Teachers need to invite parents to become part of the supporting team to help students succeed academically (Baker & Sansone, 1990; Goldstein, Campbell, & Bynum, 1991; Phelan et al., 1992; Robertson, 1997). The involvement of parents in their children's education should be accepted as a positive effort and should be acknowledged and encouraged by the teaching staff.

***6. Parents need to assist in educating the child and not rely solely on the educational system to do so.***

It is time that First Nation parents empowered themselves by exercising their right to participate in the educational system without feeling they are not worthy to do so. Parents can do many things to help their children to achieve academically. Parents and school administrators need to encourage teachers to do home visits (Goldstein et al.,

1991). Parents need to demonstrate their desire for better education for their children by asking questions regarding educational issues, attending school functions, expressing their viewpoints on education, becoming involved in their children's homework, teaching their children respect, and listening. They must encourage their children to go to school to learn. Teachers need to do home visits in First Nation communities so that the parents feel that they have a greater connection to their child's education. Teachers need to understand and become aware of the First Nation student's background, and one way that this could be accomplished is through home visits. Home visits might not be part of a teacher's duties, but it seems to have been important to the parents in this study.

***7. Using rewards to control behavior and promote academic achievement is important; humiliating the child is a negative form of discipline.***

Children feel good about themselves when they accomplish a task. Parents should reward their children at home—for example, after homework is completed—to encourage more accomplishments. Most of these rewards should be reasonable and affordable and not create hardship for the family. Rewards can also be given for the work completed in school to encourage academic achievement. These rewards do not have to be extravagant, but can be such things as watching TV, having snacks, being given privileges, and so on (Ban, 1993).

Children do not like to be humiliated, and like other children, First Nation students seem unable to cope with humiliation, which can lead to sever behavior problems. It is important that the choices of discipline be appropriate. Soldier (1992) emphasized that "direct personal criticism and harsh discipline that might negatively influence a child's self-esteem are avoided in a traditional Native American home" (p. 18).

***8. All of the members of the family types involved in this study expressed similar educational concerns.***

Homework is an important connection for parents to the educational institute. Parents feel that homework provides the child with continued learning at home and enables the child to stay focused in attaining academic achievement. The parents stressed that they wanted their children to receive homework. Lustberg (1998) stated that "teachers need to give captivating assignments which reinforce what has been taught and to stimulate parent-child interaction" (p. 18). Homework helps to reinforce the teaching that takes place in school (Lustberg, 1998). According to Ban (1993), "Homework is related to student achievement" (p. 67).

First Nation schools need to improve on such things as the courses offered; for example, more culturally relevant courses need to be emphasized in school. More open communication among all parties involved can eliminate many of the concerns shared by the parents.

These factors and concerns of First Nation families point to the need for further research in this area.

**Recommendations: Future Studies**

It is important that further research be conducted by First Nation people. Before I include the recommendations, I will restate the findings.

- Perceptions about Native culture.
- Providing early educational experiences for the child helps to promote academic achievement.
- It is important that families spend meaningful time with their children.
- Friends are an important aspect of a child's life.
- Parents desire that their children be well educated.

- Parents need to assist in educating the child and not rely solely on the educational system to do so.
- Using rewards to control behavior and promote academic achievement is important; humiliating the child is a negative form of discipline.
- The family types involved in this study expressed similar educational concerns.

The following are suggestions for future studies.

***1. Similar studies might be conducted by age, sex, or community groupings.***

In an attempt to understand fully the concept of First Nation background and academic achievement, studies that deal specifically with a certain concept such as age, for example, need to be conducted. Focusing on a particular age to gather information could be beneficial to First Nation people. Each of the above examples should be included in the study as a specific element of study. An individual might want to focus on other community members, which would include demographics as part of the study. Studies such as these would help researchers to achieve a greater understanding of the educational implications of First Nation background and its contribution to successful academic achievement.

***2. More in-depth study might be done on a certain family group, including all the family groups observed in this study, as well as families headed by single fathers and blended families.***

The diversity of family makeup today lends itself to research on how these different family backgrounds affect First Nation academic achievements. This type of study would have to focus on just one type of family group from one community or from several communities. It could even be part of the larger community outside the First Nation community. According to the findings from this study, there are many types of family units with unique backgrounds that influence the success of children academically.

***3. An in-depth study might be conducted on specific categories, such as education, culture, parenting, socialization, and meaningful time spent with children.***

Each of these factors contributes to the background of children. In conducting this in-depth study, one of these factors could be focused on to determine the influence of that particular factor on academic achievement in First Nation children. Such areas of education as teachers, specific grades, homework, and retention, could be studied. Native culture can include anything from traditional culture to external culture (culture that is defined by clothing, activity, movement, etc.). Research might also combine two factors to arrive at findings that might be beneficial to First Nation communities.

***4. The perceptions of Native culture within a community or between several communities are areas that needs further study.***

Understanding the Native culture helps to understand the background and how it effects academic achievements. Mainstream society fails to understand the need to recognize the diversity of cultures in the classroom which might hinder the success of First Nation students (Lind, 1997). Awareness and understanding about the importance of Native culture among First Nation people helps to assist the student in achieving success in First Nation communities.

***5. A study concerning the perceptions of Native culture among certain age groups of First Nation people—for example, teenagers or adults—might be conducted.***

Certain age groups have their own perceptions of Native culture. Doing an age-specific study on the perception of Native culture would be beneficial to First Nation people. The age groups might include other factors such as demographics, socioeconomic, sex, and so on. Understanding the effects of the perceptions of Native culture among certain-age First Nation people would be helpful in determining the impact on academic success.

***6. The dilemmas (if any) of First Nation researchers in conducting these studies might be an area for further study.***

Because I conducted this study with my own Native people, I found that I struggled as an individual to understand the boundaries that I had to overcome to complete the research. This unusual journey might be experienced by only me, but I am certain that there are other First Nation researchers who have traveled the same road. First Nation researchers observe customs and behaviors as they conduct their research which include protocol and attitudes that might affect the outcome of the research. Again, this type of research might include other factors such as demographics, socioeconomics, education, field discipline, and others.

**Recommendations: Uses of the Study**

It is my hope that this thesis will be used in different areas of education to benefit First Nation students and to promote understanding and awareness of First Nations students' background and how it effects academic achievement. It is very important to understand the tremendous influence of the background of First Nation students in the educational journey.

This thesis could be used as a tool to help facilitate workshops to promote awareness and understanding among parents of the influence of the home and cultural background and their parenting skills on the academic achievement of their children. They would begin to realized that their backgrounds can be different from or similar to other First Nation families and that family background does not limit academic achievement of a First Nation child, regardless of the family composition. Using this thesis as a teaching tool in a workshop would benefit the parents as well as other individuals who are interested in understanding First Nation students or the First Nation family compositions mentioned in the study.

Chief and Council of a First Nation community could use this thesis in workshops or group discussions to enhance their understanding of how their background affects academic achievement and some of the problems that permeate the educational system in First Nation band-operated schools. This thesis could be used as research tool to address a number of educational issues in First Nation communities.

Teachers can gain knowledge from or use the thesis as a guide to home visits in a First Nation community. It can also be used in inservices for new teachers, in which the new teachers could get a glimpse of what it might be like to be part of a First Nation family. In addition, this thesis could be used to inform new teachers about the First Nation background of the students. It would also benefit other educational professionals in dealing with First Nation parents and students. Regardless of how this thesis is used, the information would be beneficial to all individuals interested in understanding First Nation parents and children.

It is also imperative to acknowledge the researcher's journey as he/she completes the study.

## Reflections of a First Nation Researcher

As I wandered into the realm of research, I was naïve, yet enthusiastic. I did not understand or was not aware of the implications of study within this particular field. I was apprehensive, yet excited. I am a First Nation woman conducting research with people who I know and with whom I have shared common experiences in the community. I considered this unique position an advantage that would allow me easy access to the information that I needed to complete my study. My aim was not to create a recipe for success for the Native student by supplying the background information, but rather to facilitate an understanding of the background factors that influence academic achievement of First Nation students. This does not mean that the First Nation students in

First Nation communities are different; I was not attempting to solve a problem, but merely to supply information worth considering.

Yes, I believed that more advantages exist for me because I am Native and conducting research on a Native community, but it was not until I began my research that I realized how difficult it is emotionally to research people with whom I shared a cultural background. I saw myself as an insider looking in, but I soon realized that, instead, I would become an outsider looking in.

The initial contact was an overwhelming experience. I experienced a sense of rejection that seemed to hamper my progression with the study. I discussed these feelings with an elder (who has since passed on to the spiritual world). He was very understanding and advised me to strive to understand the people who I would be studying. These people had had many negative experiences, and he suggested that I should approach the situation with the confidence that I possessed while I was teaching their children and that I should depend on the mutual respect that we had established. I knew that that respect existed because of my experience as a teacher. He instilled in me the notion that any endeavor worth undertaking is always difficult, but the rewards can be tremendous. He suggested that I follow my instincts: if something did not feel good, then I should back away from it.

I experienced a nagging feeling of not being able to justify my research. I wanted to manifest my own and my people's [Native] truth, honesty, and integrity. Ethically, I had to agree that no harm or negativity would come to the participants in my research, and I realized that betraying my Native people would be betraying myself. In my opinion, much of the research I have read on Indigenous people is damaging and has lifelong repercussions. I initially felt that I was an insider looking in, but many of the families made me feel otherwise. I had been away from this community for almost 18 years and then had spent the last 11 years there. In other words, I could be considered an outsider

looking in because I had been away for a number of years, and being accepted as part of a group or society of people is difficult; some people never achieve this acceptance.

I believe that I am a traditional Native person. I know who I am and where I belong. I attend ceremonies, smudge, and know how to respect, to listen, and to pray. I know how to care and to give, and I relate well to people and surroundings. In my opinion, not only is Native culture external, but it also comes from within a person: feelings, spirit, and attitude. The spirit lives within the temple of the body, and how one furnishes that temple creates the vibrant spirit. This was also the teaching of my dear uncle, and this is what I possessed as I entered into the world of research.

I became uneasy because my perception of Native culture might clash with those of others, I might not understand them, or I might not be well prepared to accept others' perceptions. I was also concerned about using the appropriate approach and protocol for First Nation research. I listen to and counsel people, a gift which the Creator bestowed me and which I use with immense care. I perceive that people experience calmness in my presence. Respecting the space and individual, understanding the situations, and using humor can help to accomplish this comfortable feeling. However, even though in my mind I was an insider, I was conscious of the need for professionalism, which sometimes got in the way of my work. Nonetheless, the people with whom I worked knew that I approached them with professionalism but that I left with a feeling of friendship and a greater understanding of their background and Native culture.

I approached my research by talking to the family headed by the grandmother first, because I felt at ease with elders, and I thought that my feelings of uncertainty would be eased in this family unit. Protocol (as discussed in the chapter on methodology) took precedence over any other issue involved in this study. I was afraid that having to maintain professionalism would undermine my relationship with this family, but the more time that I spent with this elder, the more that I learned about myself as a researcher. I found that the bond that we developed made the research easier. The term *research* seems

far from what was occurring as I became more and more comfortable in the situation. We shared our perspectives of our Native culture, and I felt that I was gaining more than just information; I was gaining knowledge and a greater understanding of this particular individual as a human being as she shared her insights. My own personal biases began to subside rather than interfering with my work. As I completed my work with this wonderful Elder, I found my departure difficult; I seem to have brought light into her daily routine, and she expressed her enjoyment in our time together.. The bond that we developed will remain for a long time to come. This experience created a pathway for overcoming future challenges in this research.

The next challenge was initiating another contact. Despite my wonderful experience with the elder—she had made me feel as if I was the learner and she was the teacher—I was experiencing fear of rejection or fear of the families feeling invaded.

The next person was closer to my age, but I felt apprehensive receiving her consent to participate in the study. When she agreed to do so, I felt somewhat more relaxed. Despite my misgivings about "invading her privacy," I discovered that she had had many outside visitors because of the foster children under her care. She seemed relaxed and was eager to participate in my study. I welcomed her enthusiasm, and as she went about doing her daily chores, I realized that my presence was not a disturbing factor. The interview progressed, and my comfort level increased. My unease with the idea of being a professional researcher dissipated with her delightful response to the research. We had a good relationship during the interview, and our rapport remained intact. I believe that I acquired an understanding of this person, and I feel privileged to have worked with her.

Each time I conducted an interview or contacted a new family unit, I had to deal with feelings of discomfort in studying people whom I share commonalities of Native culture, but at the same time I valued the opportunity to be involved in other aspects of their lives. I felt somewhat apprehensive about being welcome into their homes, and I

knew that I had to approach these families with respect, honesty, and kindness. I was also aware of the need for humor to make them feel comfortable through the research experience and to help them to accept my presence in their homes. Humor plays an important role in conducting research with First Nation people. It was also important for me to conduct our interactions in such a way that these families did not feel that they were being judged. I did not approach the families with the assumption that I was the expert; I let them know that their knowledge was very important and valuable in assisting me to complete my studies. The response that I received was overwhelming as these families allowed me to be part of their lives for a brief time.

The children responded to me as they would in a typical teacher-student relationship. I gained their trust and continued to make them feel important for participating in this study. I did this by allowing them not to be pressured to do the study. However, I was determined not to let this factor of teacher-student relationship influence my research.

The idea of sharing my home and cultural background with the participants in this research meant that I would be sharing myself as a First Nation person. As an inexperienced First Nation researcher, I felt that I had to make some decisions about what to share and what not to share. If I unintentionally brought harm to the First Nation people, then I would bring harm to myself too. I believe that being a First Nation researcher and studying my people is a controversial and sensitive undertaking with many negative aspects.

The fundamental negative aspect is having to abide by the rules of the institution (the University of Alberta) without overstepping the boundaries of First Nation protocol involving cultural norms. If it had not been for the trusting relationship that I had developed with these families, the research might have experienced greater difficulties and might have been less meaningful or valuable to all the parties involved. I would again

like to thank the families/mentors/friends who have been honest, taken the time to share their perceptions and experiences with us, and allowed us to come into their homes..

The most positive result of my study is the knowledge that I have gained and my ability to share it, and getting to know these families in such an astonishing way. The honesty and kindness of these families makes First Nation research worthwhile. This thesis reveals the vast number of factors that contribute to academic achievement of First Nation students. It is crucial that the educational system develop programs to address these factors. Phelan et al. (1992) remarked that "few people in society are aware that navigating the psycho/social pressures of adolescence can be a difficult and arduous task" (p. 2). First Nation students need positive understanding and guidance in order to achieve academically. This understanding and guidance is influenced by the home and cultural background of the student. The sooner that we begin to understand the effects of First Nation students' background, the sooner we can empower these students to achieve academically and to strive to maximize their potential.

## REFERENCES


Agar, M. H. (1980). *The professional stranger: Informal introduction to ethnography.* Toronto: Academic Press.

Baker, J., & Sansone, J. (1990). Intervention with students at risk for dropping out of school: A high school responds. *Journal of Educational Research, 83*(4), 181-186.

Ban, J. (1993). *Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS): Achievement made easy by learning together.* Bloomington, IN: National Educational Services.

Baumrind, D. (1990). Socialization factors influencing adolescent behavior and development. In B. K. Barker & B. C. Rollins (Eds.), (1990), *Parent-adolescent relationship* (pp. 2-15). New York: University Press of America.

Bellerose, E. (1997, April). *Personal development workshop,* Driftpile, AB.

Berns, R. M. (1997). *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support* (4th ed.). Forth Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Collection.

Brady, P. (1996). Native dropouts and non-Native dropouts in Canada: Two solitudes or a solitude shared? *Journal of American Indian Education, 35*(2), 10-20.

Chao, R. K. (1995). *Beyond authoritarianism: A culture perspective on Asian American parenting practices.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, New York.

Chen, X. (1997). *Students' peer group in high school: The pattern and relationship to educational outcomes.* Berkeley, CA: MPR Associates.

Clifford, J. (1988). *The predicament of culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, M. (1991). *Planning for parent participation in schools for young children.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Crowl, T. K. (1996). *Fundamentals of educational research* (2nd ed.). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). *Literacy for empowerment: The role of parents in children's education.* New York: The Falmer Press.

Delgado-Gaitan, C., & Trueba, H. (1991). *Crossing cultural Borders.* Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

de Lone, R. H. (1979). *Small futures: Children, inequality, and the limits of liberal reform.* New York: Harcourt Jovanovich.

Douglas, J. W. B. (1964). *The home and the school: A study of ability and attainment in the primary school.* London, UK: MacGibbon & Kee.

Duran, R. D. (1983). *Hispanics' education and background: Predictors of college achievement.* New York: Entrance Examination Board.

Eisner, E. W. (1998). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* Columbus, OH: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Fetterman, D. M. (1989). *Ethnography step by step: Applied social research.* Methods Series (Vol. 17). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fuerro, D. (1997). *Is there a difference in learning style among cultures?* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

George, C. (1993). *Beyond retention: A study of retention rates, practices, and successful alternatives in California: A summary report.* Sacramento: California Department of Education.

Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1984). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* New York: Academic Press.

Goldstein, S., Campbell, F., & Bynum, C. (1991). *High-risk parents versus the schools: An unnecessary war.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Caroline, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

Gordon, B. (1987). Cultural comparison of schooling. *Educational Research, 16*(6), 4-7.

Grant, D., Battle, D., Murphy, S, & Heggoy, S. (1997, February). *Preliminary report: Achievement motivation in rural African-American female high school honors graduation.* Paper presented at the Twentieth Annual Conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association. Hilton Head Island, SC.

Hadaway, N. L., Florez, V. E., Larke, P. & Wisemen, D. (1988). *Multicultural education: What educators know, what they need to know.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, New Orleans.

Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension.* New York: Doubleday.

Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography?* New York: Routledge.

Hirschfelder, A. B. (1982). *American Indian stereotypes in the world of children: A reader and bibliography.* Metchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Hitchcock, G., & Hughes, D. (1989). *Research and the teacher: A qualitative introduction to school-based research.* New York: Routledge.

Hitchcock, G., & Hughes, D. (1995). *Research and the teacher. A qualitative introduction to school-based research* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Hoffman, D. (1988). Cross-cultural adaptation and learning: Iranians and Americans at school. In C. Delgado-Gaitan & H. Trueba (Eds.), *School society: Learning content through culture* (pp. 163-180). New York: Praeger.

Hollins, E. R. (1995). Revealing the deep meaning of culture in school learning: Forming a new paradigm for teacher preparation. *Action in Teacher Education, 17*(1), 70-79.

Huang, G. (1993). *Beyond culture: Communication with Asian American children and families.* New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.

Ing, N. R. (1991). The effects of residential schools on Native child-rearing practices. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 18*(Suppl.), 65-118.

Kieff, J. (1994). *Early childhood in the McAllen Independent School District.* McAllen, TX: McAllen Independent School District.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education, 60,* 73-85.

Lind, S. L. (1997). *Acknowledging culture in the classroom: An exploration of the at-risk students.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago.

Linton, R. (1963). *Acculturation in seven American Indian tribes.* Gloucester, MA: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Lustberg, M. (1998). *Partnering with parents to foster learning at home.* Morristown, NJ: Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

MacDonald, S. (1991). *Transformed contexts: Friendships of Samoan students in a non-tracked high school in Honolulu.* Akron, OH: University of Akron.

Maryland State Department of Education. (1990). *CA technical report: In the middle: Addressing the needs of at-risk students during the middle learning years.* Baltimore: Department of Education, Commission for Students at Risk of School Failure.

McCarthy, W. C. (1971). *Indian dropouts and graduates in Northern Alberta.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

McCobb, J. L. (1994). *Serving students learning English as a second language: A guide for Vermont educators.* Washington, DC: Department of Education.

Meyers, M. A. (1998). *Native Hawaiian epistemology: Contemporary narratives.* Unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Park, H. (1997). *Situating East Asians in Canadian race discourse.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Phelan, P., Cao, H. T., & Davidson, A. L. (1992). *Navigating the psycho/social pressures of adolescence: The voices and experiences of high school youth.* Washington, DC: Centre for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching.

Robertson, A. S. (1997). *If an adolescent begins to fail in school, what can parents and teachers do?* Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary Early Childhood Education.

Roddy, P. P. (1984). *A closer look at children in single-parent families.* New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction*. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.

Slavin, R. E. (1998). Can education reduce social inequity? *Educational Leadership, 55*(4), 6-10.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* Dunedin, Australia: University of Otago Press.

Soldier, L. L. (1992). Working with Native-American children. *Young Children. 47*(6), 15-21.

Spindler, G. D. (1984). Roots revisited: Three decades of perspective source. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 15*(1), 3-10.

Spindler, G. D. (1987). *Educational and cultural process: Anthropological approaches* (2nd ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Spindler, G., & Spindler, L. (1982). Roger Harker and Schoehausen: >From the familiar to the stranger and back again. In G. Spindler (Ed.), *Doing the ethnography of schooling* (pp. 20-47). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. San Diego, Ca: Harcourt Brace Janovich College Publishers.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation.* Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Steinberg, L. (1996). Ethnicity and adolescent achievement. *American Educator, 20*(2), 28-35, 44-48.

Westfall, A., & Pisapia, J. (1994). *At-risk students: Who are they and what helps them succeed?* Richmond, VA: Metropolitan Education Research Consortium.

Whitehead, P. C., & Hayes, M. J. (1998). *The sanity of alcohol: Social problems in Canadian First Nations communities.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Wilcox, K. (1988). Ethnography as a methodology and its application to the study of schooling: A review. In G. Spindler (Ed.), *Doing the ethnography of schooling: Educational anthropology in action* (pp. 37-57). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Wilson, P. (1994a). The professor/student relationship: Key factors in minority student performance and achievement. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 14*(2), 305-317.

Wilson, P. (1994b). Working on cultural issues with students: A counselling psychologist's perspective. In G. Spindler & L. Spindler (Eds.), *Pathway to cultural awareness: Cultural therapy with teachers and students* (pp. 221-245). Santa Barbara, CA: Corwin Press.

Wilson, S. (1989). *Cultural conflict and academic achievement of Cree Indian students: Perceptions of schooling from Opasquia Ininiwuk.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Santa Barbara, CA.

Witt, N. (1998). Promoting self-esteem, defining culture. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 22*(2), 260-273.

Wolcott, H. F. (1987). On ethnographic intent. In G. Spindler & L. Spindler (Eds.), *Interpretive ethnography of education: At home and abroad* (pp. 37-57). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Woods, P. (1986). *Inside schools: Ethnography in educational research.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wub-e-ke-niew. (1995). *We have the right to exist: A translation of Aboriginal indigenous thought: The first book ever published from an Ahnishinahbae O'jibway perspective.* New York: Black Thistle Press.

Wyrostok, N. C. (1997). *First Nation women: A case study.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Yawkey, T. D, & Cornelius, G. M. (1990). *The single parent family: For helping professionals and parents.* Lancaster, PA: Technomic.

## APPENDIX A

## CONSENT LETTER

University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
Graduate Program in First Nation Education
780 - 492 -3679

Pauline Giroux
Box 136
Joussard, AB
TOG 1J0
780 - 355 - 2003

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am a graduate student in the First Nation Program at the University of Alberta. As part of my master's degree requirements, I will be conducting recorded formal and informal interviews and observations to obtain background information on the home and culture of the participants.

I understand that complete anonymity and confidentiality will be of utmost importance. Your safety from harm or threats is very important to me. You are under no obligation to complete this research and need not feel any stress if you decide to opt out of this study. I understand that discussion of the preliminary findings will take place and is subject to your approval.

The interviews will be conducted according to your time, place, and comfort. They will be approximately one to two hours in length. I will be conducting the interviews approximately three or four times at different date intervals.

Please sign the form below to indicate your willingness to participate in this research. Again I would like to stress that you are not obligated to continue your participation for the duration of the research. All of the tapes will be destroyed when the research is completed. Please indicate below if you consent for an assistant to have access to the information you provide. Finally, please understand that accessibility to the children's school records will be left to your discretion. Please indicate if you are willing to allow me access to your child's school records. Any information taken will not identify the person or persons involved. I will be using false names to protect their identity.

# CONSENT FORM

I _____ understand the above information
(signature)

and consent to take part in the research.

Date: _____

Yes, I _____ give my permission to
(signature)

interview and observe my children for this research.

I _____ understand the above information
(child's signature)

and consent to take part in the research.

Yes, I _____ give my consent for an
(signature)

assistant to have access to the information I provide (for the purposes of this research only).

I _____ give my consent to have access to
(signature)

my child's school records for the sole purpose of this research.

## APPENDIX B

## *CATEGORY GUIDE

## FOR CHILDREN

- How long did you live in this place (location)?
- Do you like living in this place, and why or why not?
- What things do you like about school?
- What things don't you like about school?
- What things or activities do you like to do at home?
- Do you have any house rules? What are they?
- What family activities do you do at home?
- What things do you do to earn stuff at home? Or do you just get what you want?
- What things does your guardian/parent do to discipline you that helps you to understand your behavior?
- What things are special between you and your guardian/parent/parents or grandparents?
- Could you explain to me what culture is to you?
- What things do you do at home for cultural activities?
- Do you think that culture is important in your life? Why? Why not?
- Whenever you participate in cultural activities, at home or in school or in your community, what seems to be the best activity and why?
- What kinds of cultural activities would you like to see at school, if any, and why?
- If you could change your school, what things would you do?
- When you get homework, who helps you with it (if you need help)?
- Do you remember when you were small if you did special things with your guardian/parent/parents/grandmother? What are these things, and do you still do them?
- Do you have many friends that come to your home? If not, why not?
- Do you have many friends in school?
- Where would you like to travel to if you could go anywhere? Why?

*Perceptions on education, cultural inclusion, parenting skills and education, socialization, and the influence of friends

## *CATEGORY GUIDE

## FOR ADULTS

- What is your perception of a good education?
- What kinds of family activities take place in your home after school?
- Do you have a lot of house rules that your child has to follow? What are they? Describe or give me examples
- How is his/her school involved with home life?
- What kinds of discipline techniques do you use?
- What is your perception of culture?
- What things does your grandchild/child/foster child get involved with in the community?
- What kinds of cultural activities do you and your grandson/child/foster child participate in?
- What kinds of things do you remember [child's name] doing that needed your guidance? Explain and give examples.
- Could you tell me a little of [child's name]'s younger years, the things he/she did?
- Could you explain [child's name]'s reaction when he/she wants to buy something special? What kinds of things does he/she do to earn it? How does he/she react if he/she cannot get certain things?
- How much traveling does [child's name] do and to where?
- When [child's name] brings homework home, how does he/she get help in the family?
- Do you think that culture is important in [child's name] schooling and home life, and why?
- Explain to me some of [child's name]'s friends, their connection to each other.
- Do you talk to [child's name] about your school experiences? Explain what kinds of things you tell him.
- In your opinion, who do you think is responsible for a good education? How? Why?
- What is your favorite thing about being a guardian/parent/grandparent?
- What do you dislike the most of being a guardian/parent/grandparent?
- If you could, would you like to see more cultural activities happening at home? If yes, what kinds of cultural activities?
- Do you think it is important to practice your culture? How?

*Perceptions on education, cultural inclusion, parenting skills and education, socialization, and the influence of friends